INFIDEL DEATH-BEDS

G. W. FOOTE
AND
A. D. McLAREN

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New Revised and Much Enlarged Edition

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Published for the Secular Society Ltd.
The Pioneer Press (G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd.)
61, Farringdon Street, E.C. 4

PART I

NOTE.

FORTY-SEVEN years have passed since the first edition of this book was published. During that time the list of "infidel death-beds" has, naturally, been considerably augmented, and it now includes the name of the original author, George William Foote.

I am responsible for the whole of Part II of the present edition, and for the records of those Freethinkers whose names are marked with an asterisk in the Index.

A.D.M.

INTRODUCTION.

INFIDEL death-beds have been a fertile theme of pulpit eloquence. The priests of Christianity often inform their congregations that Faith is an excellent soft pillow, and Reason a horrible hard bolster, for the dying head. Freethought, they say, is all very well in the days of our health and strength, when we are buoyed up by the pride of carnal intellect; but ah! how poor a thing it is when health and strength fail us, when, deserted by our self-sufficiency, we need the support of a stronger power. In that extremity the proud Freethinker turns to Jesus Christ, renounces his wicked scepticism, implores pardon of the Saviour he has despised, and shudders at the awful scenes that await him in the next world should the hour of forgiveness be past.

Pictorial art has been pressed into the service of this plea for religion, and in such orthodox periodicals as the *British Workman,* to say nothing of the hordes of pious inventions which are circulated as tracts, expiring sceptics have been portrayed in agonies of terror, gnashing their teeth, wringing their hands, rolling their eyes, and exhibiting every sign of despair.

One minister of the gospel, the Rev. Erskine Neale, has not thought it beneath his dignity to compose an extensive series of these holy frauds, under the title of

Closing Scenes. This work was, at one time, very popular and influential; but its specious character having been exposed, it has fallen into disrepute, or at least into neglect.

The real answer to these arguments, if they may be called such, is to be found in the body of the present work. I have narrated in a brief space, and from the best authorities, the "closing scenes" in the lives of many eminent Freethinkers during the last three centuries. They are not anonymous persons without an address, who cannot be located in time or space, and who simply serve "to point a moral or adorn a tale." Their names are in most cases historical, and in some cases familiar to fame; great poets, philosophers, historians, and wits, of deathless memory, who cannot be withdrawn from the history of our race without robbing it of much of its dignity and splendour.

In some instances I have prefaced the story of their deaths with a short, and in others with a lengthy, record of their lives. The ordinary reader cannot be expected to possess a complete acquaintance with the career and achievements of every great soldier of progress; and I have therefore considered it prudent to afford such information as might be deemed necessary to a proper appreciation of the character, the greatness, and the renown, of the subjects of my sketches. When the hero of the story has been the object of calumny or misrepresentation, when his death has been falsely related, and simple facts have been woven into a tissue of lying absurdity, I have not been content with a bare narration of the truth; I have carried the war into the enemy's camp, and refuted their mischievous libels.

One of our greatest living thinkers entertains "the belief that the English mind, not readily swayed by

rhetoric, moves freely under the pressure of facts."[1] I may therefore venture to hope that the facts I have recorded will have their proper effect on the reader's mind. Yet it may not be impolitic to examine the orthodox argument as to death-bed repentance.

Carlyle, in his *Essay on Voltaire,* utters a potent warning against anything of the kind :—

> Surely the parting agonies of a fellow-mortal, when the spirit of our brother, rapt in the whirlwinds and thick ghastly vapours of death, clutches blindly for help, and no help is there, are not the scenes where a wise faith would seek to exult, when it can no longer hope to alleviate! For the rest, to touch farther on those their *idle tales of dying horrors,* remorse, and the like; to write of such, to believe them, or disbelieve them, or in anywise discuss them, were but a continuation of the same ineptitude. He who, after the imperturbable exit of so many Cartouches and Thurtells, in every age of the world, can continue to regard the manner of a man's death as a test of his religious orthodoxy, may boast himself impregnable to merely terrestial logic.[2]

There is a great deal of truth in this vigorous passage. I fancy, however, that some of the dupes of priestcraft are not absolutely impregnable to terrestrial logic, and I discuss the subject for their sakes, even at the risk of being held guilty of " ineptitude."

Throughout the world the religion of mankind is determined by the geographical accident of their birth. In England men grow up Protestants; in Italy, Catholics; in Russia, Greek Christians; in Turkey, Mohammedans; in India, Brahmans; in China, Buddhists or Confucians. What they are taught in their childhood they believe in their manhood; and they die in the faith in which they have lived.

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[1] Dr. E. B. Tylor : Preface to second edition of *Primitive Culture.*

[2] *Essays,* Vol II., p. 161 (People's edition).

Here and there a few men think for themselves. If they discard the faith in which they have been educated, they are never free from its influence. It meets them at every turn, and is constantly, by a thousand ties, drawing them back to the orthodox fold. The stronger resist this attraction, the weaker succumb to it. Between them is the average man, whose tendency will depend on several things. If he is isolated, or finds but few sympathisers, he may revert to the ranks of faith; if he finds many of the same opinion with himself, he will probably display more fortitude. Even Freethinkers are gregarious, and in the worst as well as the best sense of the words, the saying of Novalis is true—" My thought gains infinitely when it is shared by another."

But in all cases of reversion, the sceptic invariably turns to the creed of his own country. What does this prove? Simply the power of our environment, and the force of early training. When " infidels " are few, and their relatives are orthodox, what could be more natural than what is called " a death-bed recantation?" Their minds are enfeebled by disease, or the near approach of death; they are surrounded by persons who continually urge them to be reconciled to the popular faith; and is it astonishing if they sometimes yield to these solicitations? Is it wonderful if, when all grows dim, and the priestly carrion-crow of the death-chamber mouths the perfunctory shibboleths, the weak brain should become dazed, and the poor tongue mutter a faint response?

Should the dying man be old, there is still less reason for surprise. Old age yearns back to the cradle, and as Dante Rossetti says :—

> Life all past
> Is like the sky when the sun sets in it,
> Clearest where furthest off.

The " recantation " of old men, if it occurs, is easily

understood. Having been brought up in a particular religion, their earliest and tenderest memories may be connected with it; and when they lie down to die they may mechanically recur to it, just as they may forget whole years of their maturity, and vividly remember the scenes of their childhood. Those who have read Thackeray's exquisitely faithful and pathetic narrative of the death of old Col. Newcome, will remember that as the evening chapel bell tolled its last note, he smiled, lifted his head a little, and cried *Adsum*! ("I am present"), the boy's answer when the names were called at school.

Cases of recantation, if they were ever common, which does not appear to be true, are now exceedingly rare; so rare, indeed, that they are never heard of except in anonymous tracts, which are evidently concocted for the glory of God, rather than the edification of Man. Sceptics are at present numbered by thousands, and they can nearly always secure at their bedsides the presence of friends who share their unbelief. Every week, the Freethought journals report quietly, and as a matter of course, the peaceful end of "infidels" who, having lived without hypocrisy, have died without fear. They are frequently buried by their heterodox friends, and never a week passes without the Secular Burial Service, or some other appropriate words, being read by sceptics over a sceptic's grave.

Christian ministers know this. They usually confine themselves, therefore, to the death-bed stories of Paine and Voltaire, which have been again and again refuted. Little, if anything, is said about the eminent Freethinkers who have died in the present generation. The priests must wait half a century before they can hope to defame them with success. Our cry to these pious sutlers is "Hands off!" Refute the arguments of Freethinkers,

if you can; but do not obtrude your disgusting presence in the death chamber, or vent your malignity over their tombs.

Supposing, however, that *every* Freethinker turned Christian on his death-bed. It is a tremendous stretch of fancy, but I make it for the sake of argument. What does it prove? Nothing, as I said before, but the force of our surroundings and early training. It is a common saying among Jews, when they hear of a Christian proselyte, "Ah, wait till he comes to die!" As a matter of fact, converted Jews generally die in the faith of their race; and the same is alleged as to the native converts that are made by our missionaries in India.

Heine has a pregnant passage on this point. Referring to Joseph Schelling, who was "an apostate to his own thought," who "deserted the altar he had himself consecrated," and "returned to the crypts of the past," Heine rebukes the "old believers," who cried *Kyrie eleison* ("Lord, have mercy") in honour of such a conversion. "That," he says "proves nothing for their doctrine. It only proves that man turns to religion when he is old and fatigued, when his physical and mental force has left him, when he can no longer enjoy nor reason. So many Freethinkers are converted on their death-beds! . . . But at least do not boast of them. These legendary conversions belong at best to pathology, and are a poor evidence for your cause. After all, they only prove this, that it was impossible for you to convert those Freethinkers while they were healthy in body and mind."[3]

Renan has some excellent words on the same subject in his delightful volume of autobiography. After expressing a rooted preference for a sudden death, he continues: "I should be grieved to go through one of those

[3] *De l'Allemagne*, Vol. I,, p. 174.

periods of feebleness, in which the man who has possessed strength and virtue is only the shadow and ruins of himself, and often, to the great joy of fools, occupies himself in demolishing the life he had laboriously built up. Such an old age is the worst gift the gods can bestow on man. If such a fate is reserved for me, I protest in advance against the fatuities that a softened brain may make me say or sign. It is Renan sound in heart and head, such as I am now, and not Renan half destroyed by death, and no longer himself, as I shall be if I decompose gradually, that I wish people to listen to and believe." [4]

To find the best passage on this topic in our own literature we must go back to the seventeenth century, and to Selden's *Table Talk*, a volume in which Coleridge found "more weighty bullion sense" than he "ever found in the same number of pages of any uninspired writer." Selden lived in a less mealy-mouthed age than ours, and what I am going to quote smacks of the blunt old times; but it is too good to miss, and all readers who are not prudish will thank me for citing it. "For a priest," says Selden, "to turn a man when he lies a dying, is just like one that has a long time solicited a woman, and cannot obtain his end; at length he makes her drunk, and so lies with her." It is a curious thing that the writer of these words helped to draw up the Westminster Confession of faith.

For my own part, while I have known many Freethinkers who were steadfast to their principles in death, I have never known a single case of recantation. The fact is, Christians are utterly mistaken on this subject. It is quite intelligible that those who believe in a vengeful God, and an everlasting hell, should tremble on "the brink of eternity"; and it is natural that they should ascribe to others the same trepidation. But a moment's re-

[4] *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*, p. 377.

flexion must convince them that this is fallacious. The only terror in death is the apprehension of what lies beyond it, and that emotion is impossible to a sincere disbeliever. Of course the orthodox may ask, "But is there a sincere disbeliever?" To which I can only reply, like Diderot, by asking, "Is there a sincere Christian?"

Professor Tyndall, while repudiating Atheism himself, has borne testimony to the earnestness of others who embrace it. "I have known some of the most pronounced among them," he says, "not only in life but in death—seen them approaching with open eyes the inexorable goal, with no dread of a hangman's whip, with no hope of a heavenly crown, and still as mindful of their duties, and as faithful in the discharge of them, as if their eternal future depended on their latest deeds." [5]

Lord Bacon said, "I do not believe that any man fears to be dead, but only the stroke of death." True, and the physical suffering, and the pang of separation, are the same for all. Yet the end of life is as natural as its beginning, and the true philosophy of existence is nobly expressed in the lofty sentence of Spinoza, "A free man thinks less of nothing than of death."

"So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams." [6]

G.W.F.

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[5] *Fortnightly Review*, November, 1877.

[6] Bryant, *Thanatopsis*.

INFIDEL DEATH-BEDS.

LORD AMBERLEY.

VISCOUNT AMBERLEY, the eldest son of the late Earl Russell, and the author of a very heretical work entitled an *Analysis of Religious Belief*, lived and died a Freethinker. His will, stipulating that his son should be educated by a sceptical friend was set aside by Earl Russell; the law of England being such, that Freethinkers are denied the parental rights which are enjoyed by their Christian neighbours. Lady Frances Russell, who signs with her initials the Preface to Lord Amberley's book, which was published afer his death, writes: "Ere the pages now given to the public had left the press, the hand that had written them was cold, the heart—of which few could know the loving depths—had ceased to beat, the far-ranging mind was for ever still, the fervent spirit was at rest. Let this be remembered by those who read, and add slemnity to the solemn purpose of the book."

JOHN BASKERVILLE

BASKERVILLE'S name is well known in the republic of letters, and his memory still lingers in Birmingham, where he carried on the trade of a printer. He was

celebrated for the excellence of his workmanship, the beauty of his types, and the splendour of his editions. Born in 1706, he died on January 8, 1775. He was buried in a tomb in his own garden, on which was placed the following inscription :—

Stranger,
Beneath this cone, in unconsecrated ground,
A friend to the liberties of mankind directed
His body to be inurned.
May the example contribute to emancipate thy
Mind from the idle fears of Superstition
And the wicked arts of Priesthood.

This virtuous man and useful citizen took precautions against " the wicked arts of priesthood." "His will," says Mr. Leslie Stephen, " professed open contempt for Christianity, and the biographers who reproduce the document always veil certain passages with lines of stars as being ' far too indecent (*i.e.*, irreverent) for repetition.' " [1]

PIERRE BAYLE.

Pierre Bayle was the author of the famous Dictionary which bears his name. This monument of learning and acuteness has been of inestimable service to succeeding writers. Gibbon himself laid it under contribution, and acknowledged his indebtedness to the "celebrated writer " and " philosopher " of Amsterdam. Elsewhere Gibbon calls him "the indefatigable Bayle," an epithet which is singularly appropriate, since he worked fourteen hours daily for over forty years. Born on November 18, 1647, Bayle died on December 28, 1706. He continued writing to the very end, and " laboured constantly, with the same

[1] *Dictionary of National Biography.*

tranquillity of mind as if death has not been ready to interrupt his work.[2] This is the testimony of a friend, and a similar statement is made in the *Nouvelle Biographie Générale,* which says, "He died in his clothes, and as it were pen in hand." According to Des Maiseaux, "he saw death approaching without either fearing or desiring it." Nor did his jocularity desert him any more than his scepticism. Writing to Lord Shaftesbury on October 29, 1706—only two months before his death—he said: "I should have thought that a dispute with Divines would put me out of humour, but I find by experience that it serves as an amusement for me in the solitude to which I have reduced myself."

The final moments of this great scholar are described by a friend who had the account from an attendant. "M. Bayle died," says M. Seers, "with great tranquillity and without anybody with him. At nine o'clock in the morning his landlady entered his chamber; he asked her, but with a dying voice, if his fire was kindled, and died a moment after, without M. Basnage,[3] or me, or any of his friends with him."

JEREMY BENTHAM.

BENTHAM exercised a profound influence on the party of progress for nearly two generations. He was the father of Philosophical Radicalism, which did so much to free the minds and bodies of the English people, and which counted among its swordsmen historians like Grote, philosophers like Mill, wits like Sydney Smith, journalists like Fonblanque, and politicians

[2] Des Maiseaux, *Life of Bayle,* prefixed to the English translation of the "Dictionary."

[3] M. Basnage—the author of the first History of the Jews.

like Roebuck. As a reformer in jurisprudence he has no equal. His brain swarmed with progressive ideas and projects for the improvement and elevation of mankind; and his fortune, as well as his intellect, was ever at the service of advanced causes. His scepticism was rather suggested than paraded in his multitudinous writings, but it was plainly expressed in a few special volumes. *Not Paul, but Jesus,* published under the pseudonym of Gamaliel Smith is a slashing attack on the Great Apostle. The *Church of England Catechism Explained* is a merciless criticism of that great instrument for producing mental and political slaves. But the most thorough-going of Bentham's works was a little volume written by Grote from the Master's notes—the *Influence of Natural Religion on the Temporal Happiness of Mankind*—in which theology is assailed as the historic and necessary enemy of human liberty, enlightenment, and welfare.

Born on February 15, 1748, Bentham died on June 6, 1832. By a will dating as far back as 1769, his body was left for the purposes of science, " not out of affectation of singularity, but to the intent and with the desire that mankind may reap some small benefit in and by my decease, having hitherto had small opportunities to contribute thereto while living." A memorandum affixed shows that this clause was deliberately confirmed two months before his death.

Dr. Southwood Smith delivered a lecture over Bentham's remains, three days after his death, in the Webb Street School of Anatomy. He thus described the last moments of his illustrious friend :—

> Some time before his death, when he truly believed he was near that hour, he said to one of his disciples, who was watching over him : " I now feel that I am dying : our care must be to minimise the

pain. Do not let any of the servants come into my room and keep away the youth : it will be distressing to them, and they can be of no service. Yet I must not be alone : *you* will remain with me, and you only; and then we shall have reduced the pain to the least possible amount." Such were his last thoughts and feelings.[4]

Mr. Leslie Stephen relates a similar story in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. As a Utilitarian, Bentham regarded happiness as the only good and pain as the only evil. He met death " serenely," but like a sensible man he " minimised the pain."

PAUL BERT.

PAUL BERT was born at Auxerre in October, 1833, and he died at Tonquin on November 11, 1886. His father educated him in a detestation of priests, and his own nature led him to the pursuit of science. He took the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1863, and three years later the degree of Doctor of Science. His political life began with the fall of the Empire. After the war of 1870-71 he entered the Chamber of Deputies, and devoted his great powers to the development of public education. Largely through his labours, the Chamber voted free, secular, and compulsory instruction for both sexes. He was idolized by the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in France. Being accused of a " blind hatred " of priests, he replied in the Chamber—" The conquests of education are made on the domain of religion; I am forced to meet on my road Catholic superstitions and Romish policy, or rather it is across their empire that my path seems to me naturally traced." Speaking at a mass meet-

[4] Dr. Southwood Smith's *Lecture*, p. 62.

ing at the Cirque d'Hiver, in August, 1881, Gambetta himself being in the chair, Paul Bert declared that " modern societies march towards morality in proportion as they leave religion behind." Afterwards he published his scathing *Morale des Jésuites,* over twenty thousand copies of which were sold in less than a year. The book was dedicated to Bishop Freppel in a vein of masterly irony. Paul Bert also published a scientific work, the *Première Année d'Enseignement Scientifique,* which is almost universally used in the French primary schools.

During Gambetta's short-lived government Paul Bert held the post of Minister of Public Instruction. In 1886 he went out to Tonquin as Resident-General. Hard work and the pestilential climate laid him low and he succumbed to dysentery. When the news of his death reached the French Chamber, M. Freycinet thus announced the event from the tribune :—

> I announce with the deepest sorrow the death of M. Paul Bert. He died literally on the field of honour, broken down by the fatigues and hardships which he so bravely endured in trying to carry out the glorious task which he had undertaken. The Chamber loses by his death one of its most eminent members, Science one of its most illustrious votaries, France one of her most loving and faithful children, and the Government a fellow-worker of inestimable value, in whom we placed the fullest confidence. Excuse me, gentlemen, if because my strength fails me I am unable to proceed.

The sitting was raised as a mark of respect, and the next day the Chamber voted a public funeral and a pension to Paul Bert's family. Bishop Freppel opposed the first vote on the ground that the deceased was an inveterate enemy of religion, but he was ignominously beaten, the majority against him being 379 to

45. Despite this miserable protest, while Paul Bert's body was on its way to Europe the clerical party started a *canard* about his "conversion." Perhaps the story originated in the fact that he had daily visited the Haoni Hospital, distributing books and medicines and speaking kind words to the nuns in attendance. It was openly stated and unctuously commented on in the religious journals, that the Resident-General had sent for a Catholic bishop on his death-bed and taken the sacrament; and as inventions of this kind are always circumstantial, it was said that the Papal Nuncio at Lisbon had received this intelligence. But on December 29 the Papal Nuncio telegraphed that his name had been improperly used; and two days later, when the French war-ship touched at the Suez Canal, Madame Bert telegraphed that the story was absolutely and entirely false.

LORD BOLINGBROKE.

HENRY ST. JOHN, VISCOUNT BOLINGBROKE, was born in 1672 at Battersea, where he also died on December 12, 1751. His life was a stormy one, and on the fall of the Tory Ministry, of which he was a distinguished member, he was impeached by the Whig Parliament under the leadership of Sir Robert Walpole. It was merely a party prosecution and although Bolingbroke was attainted of high treason, he did not lose a friend or forfeit the respect of honest men. Swift and Pope held him in the highest esteem; they corresponded with him throughout their lives, and it was from Bolingbroke that Pope derived the principles of the *Essay on Man*. That Bolingbroke's abilities were of the highest order cannot be gainsaid. His political writings are masterpieces of learning, eloquence and

wit, the style is sinewy and graceful, and in the greatest heat of controversy he never ceases to be a gentleman. His philosophical writings were published after his death by his literary executor, David Mallet, whom Johnson described as "a beggarly Scotchman" who was "left half-a-crown" to fire off a blunderbus, which his patron had charged, against "religion and morality." Johnson's opinion on such a subject is however, of trifling importance. He hated Scotchmen and Infidels, and he told Boswell that Voltaire and Rousseau deserved transportation more than any of the scoundrels who were tried at the Old Bailey.

Bolingbroke's philosophical writings show him to have been a Deist. He believed in God, but he rejected Revelation. His views are advanced and supported with erudition, eloquence, and masterly irony. The approach of death, which was preceded by the excruciating disease of cancer in the cheek, did not produce the least change in his convictions. According to Goldsmith, "He was consonant with himself to the last; and those principles which he had all along avowed, he confirmed with his dying breath, having given orders that none of the clergy should be permitted to trouble him in his last moments." [5]

CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

BRADLAUGH is the greatest personality in the history of the popular Freethought Movement in England. He was born in London on September 26, 1833, and the centenary of his birth is now being celebrated by English Freethinkers throughout the world. As a

[5] *Life of Lord Bolingbroke*: Works, IX., p. 248: Tegg. 1835.

boy he was " an eager and exemplary Sunday School scholar " of St. Peter's Church, Bethnal Green, and studied the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Gospels as a preparation for confirmation. Finding discrepancies he wrote to the incumbent, the Rev. J. G. Packer, for his " aid and explanation." The net result of these inquiries was that the youth was obliged to leave his father's home, and " from that day until his death his life was one long struggle against the bitterest animosity which religious bigotry could inspire." Bradlaugh soon afterwards attended the " infidel " meetings in Bonner's Fields, and later came into contact with the militant Freethinkers of the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, Richard Carlile, the brothers Holyoake and others. From this time until 1868, when he became a candidate for Parliament, he carried on a vigorous Freethought propaganda under the name of " Iconoclast." During this period, and for some time afterwards, he was also actively working for Republicanism. In his short *Autobiography* (1873) he refers to his lectures on "The Impeachment of the House of Brunswick." " I have sought," he says, " and not entirely without success," to organize " the Republican movement on a thoroughly legal basis."

In 1860 he established the *National Reformer*, an uncompromisingly Atheistic journal, which at first had to contend against a host of difficulties, including a Government prosecution to compel him to find securities against the publication of matter of a blasphemous or seditious nature. His successful defence resulted in the repeal of the Security Laws. Bradlaugh's knowledge of the law was wide, but apart from this he always showed remarkable penetration in perceiving the legal points involved in the charges brought against him. In 1876, when he and Mrs.

Besant were prosecuted for publishing a Malthusian work, his accurate knowledge of the law again stood him in good stead. They were convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal.

In 1866 Bradlaugh founded the National Secular Society and remained its President until 1890. The Society is still flourishing and keeps a strong current of popular Freethought in movement all over England.

Bradlaugh first became a candidate for Parliament in 1868, but was not elected till 1880. He asked to be allowed to make affirmation of allegiance, instead of taking the oath, but a Select Committee reported against his claim. The story of his Parliamentary struggle and his subsequent triumph, the last stage in which only came at the time of his death, cannot be related here. It is a thrilling story and reveals the character of the man as it stands written in every chapter of his career from his first encounter with the Rev. J. G. Packer. In 1886 Bradlaugh was allowed to take his seat and two years later, through his instrumentality, a Bill was carried permitting an affirmation to be made in all cases where an oath was required by law.

Although a considerable part of Bradlaugh's life was devoted to political work, it is probably as the "image-breaker," the protagonist of Freethought, that he will be longest remembered. A bare list of the names of those with whom he debated would probably fill several pages of this book. It is needless to say that he never left any room for doubt as to what his real convictions were. He has himself told us that "about the middle of 1850" he was "honoured by" the *British Banner* with a leading article "vigorously assailing" him for his lectures against Christianity. This "assailing" never ceased during his life, and was by no means confined to his views and opinions.

He wrote numerous pamphlets. The *Plea for Atheism* appeared in 1877 and has frequently been reprinted. *Humanity's Gain from Unbelief* has also had a wide circulation. In the debate with the Rev. W. M. Westerby on *Has or is Man a Soul?* (1879), and elsewhere, he shows his complete rejection of belief in a future life.

Bradlaugh died on January 30, 1891. His daughter, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, took minute precautions to procure " signed testimony from those who had been attending him," that during his last illness he had never uttered a word directly or indirectly bearing upon religion. The last words she heard him speak during the night of his death " were reminiscent of his voyage to India." Despite this testimony the traditional Christian falsehoods on this subject are still circulated and the writer of this notice is constantly encountering them. As recently as May, 1932, Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner found it necessary to refute the absurd story about her father's holding a watch and challenging God to kill him in sixty seconds. (*The Literary Guide*, p. 84.) Such mendacities no longer yield the amusement of novelty to Freethinkers, they are rather considered a tribute to Bradlaugh's greatness.

Authority: *Charles Bradlaugh* (1894) and *Did Charles Bradlaugh die an Atheist?* (1913), both by Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner.

BROUSSAIS.

Francis Jean Victor Broussais, the great French physician and philosopher, was born in 1772. He died on November 17th, 1838, leaving behind him a " profession of faith," which was published by his

biographer. With respect to immortality, he wrote, "I have no fears or hopes as to a future life, since I am unable to conceive it." His views on the God idea were equally negative. "I cannot," he said, "form any notion of such a power."

GIORDANO BRUNO.

THIS glorious martyr of Freethought did not die in a quiet chamber, tended by loving hands. He was literally "butchered to make a Roman holiday." When the assassins of "the bloody faith" kindled the fire which burnt out his splendid life, he was no decrepit man, nor had the finger of Death touched his cheek with a pallid hue. The blood coursed actively through his veins, and a dauntless spirit shone in his noble eyes. It might have been Bruno that Shelley had in mind when he wrote those thrilling lines in *Queen Mab*:—

> I was an infant when my mother went
> To see an Atheist burned. She took me there:
> The dark-robed priests were met around the pile,
> The multitude was gazing silently;
> And as the culprit passed with dauntless mien,
> Tempered disdain in his unaltering eye,
> Mixed with a quiet smile, shone calmly forth:
> The thirsty fire crept round his manly limbs;
> His resolute eyes were scorched to blindness soon;
> His death-pang rent my heart! The insensate mob
> Uttered a cry of triumph, and I wept.

Giordano Bruno was born at Nola, near Naples, in 1548, ten years after the death of Copernicus, and ten years before the birth of Bacon. At the age of fifteen he became a novice in the monastery of San Domenico Maggiore, and after his year's novitiate expired he took the monastic vows. Studying deeply,

he became heretical, and an act of accusation was drawn up against the boy of sixteen. Eight years later he was threatened with another trial for heresy. A third process was more to be dreaded, and in his twenty-eighth year Bruno fled from his persecutors. He visited Rome, Noli, Venice, Turin and Padua. At Milan he made the acquaintance of Sir Philip Sidney. After teaching for some time in the university, he went to Chambery, but the ignorance and bigotry of its monks were too great for his patience. He next visited Geneva, but although John Calvin was dead, his dark spirit still remained, and only flight preserved Bruno from the fate of Servetus. Through Lyons he passed to Toulouse, where he was elected Public Lecturer to the University. In 1579 he went to Paris. The streets were still foul with the blood of the Bartholomew massacres, but Bruno declined a professorship at the Sorbonne, a condition of which was attending mass. Henry the Third, however, made him Lecturer extraordinary to the University. Paris at length became too hot to hold him, and he went to London, where he lodged with the French Ambassador. His evenings were mostly spent with Sir Philip Sidney, Fulke Greville, Dyer and Hervey. So great was his fame that he was invited to read at the University of Oxford, where he also held a public debate with its orthodox professors on the Copernican astronomy. Leaving London in 1584, he returned to Paris, and there also he publicly disputed with the Sorbonne. His safety being once more threatened, he went to Marburg, and thence to Wittenberg, where he taught for two years. At Helenstadt he was excommunicated by Boëtius. Repairing to Frankfort, he made the acquaintance of a nobleman, who lured him to Venice and betrayed him to the Inquisition. The Venetian Council transferred him to

Rome, where he languished for seven years in a pestiferous dungeon, and was repeatedly tortured, according to the hellish code of the Inquisition. At length, on February 10th, 1600, he was led out to the Church of Santa Maria, and sentenced to be burnt alive, or, as the Holy Church hypocritically phrased it, to be punished "as mercifully as possible, and without effusion of blood." Haughtily raising his head, he exclaimed: "You are more afraid to pronounce my sentence than I to receive it." He was allowed a week's grace for recantation, but without avail; and on the 17th of February, 1600, he was burnt to death on the Field of Flowers. To the last he was brave and defiant; he contemptuously pushed aside the crucifix they presented him to kiss; and, as one of his enemies said, he died without a plaint or a groan.

Such heroism stirs the blood more than the sound of a trumpet. Bruno stood at the stake in solitary and awful grandeur. There was not a friendly face in the vast crowd around him. It was one man against the world. Surely the knight of Liberty, the champion of Freethought, who lived such a life and died such a death, without hope of reward on earth or in heaven, sustained only by his indomitable manhood, is worthy to be accounted the supreme martyr of all time. He towers above the less disinterested martyrs of Faith like a colossus; the proudest of them might walk under him without bending.

Authorities: M. Bartholomèss, *Jordano Bruno*, 2 vols. I Frith, *Life of Giordano Bruno.*

HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE.

The author of the famous *History of Civilisation* believed in God and immortality, but he rejected all the

special tenets of Christianity. He died at Damascus on May 29th, 1862. His incoherent utterances in the fever that carried him off showed that his mind was still dwelling on the uncompleted purpose of his life. "Oh my book," he exclaimed, "my book, I shall never finish my book!" [6] His end, however, was quite peaceful. His biographer says: "He had a very quiet night, with intervals of consciousness; but at six in the morning a sudden and very marked change for the worse became but too fearfully evident; and at a quarter past ten he quietly breathed his last, with merely a wave of the hand." [7]

SIR RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON.

Sir Richard Burton, traveller and author, was born in Hertfordshire in 1821. He died on 20th October, 1890, and his wife's conduct in regard to his death and burial was at the time the subject of wide comment, especially among Burton's friends. Lady Isabel Burton was a devout Roman Catholic. According to her story, Burton had his fits of Catholicism, outspoken Agnosticism and Eastern Mysticism, but consistently maintained that in religion "there were only two points, Agnosticism and Catholicism." Four days before he died, she says he "wrote a declaration" that he wished to die a Catholic, but a few weeks previously he upset her by "an unusual burst of agnostic talk at tea." She had the extreme unction of the Catholic Church administered to him, but everybody in the house and every member of Burton's staff ex-

[6] *Pilgrim Memories*, by J. Stuart Glennie, p. 508.

[7] *Life and Writings of Henry Thomas Buckle*, by A. Huth, Vol. II., p. 252.

cept the maid, was surprised at her sending for the priest. Burton was actually dead when these " last comforts " of the Church were administered, and Lady Burton afterwards fully admitted this. Nevertheless " he had three Church services performed over him, and 1,100 masses said for the repose of his soul." (Thomas Wright, *Life of Sir Richard Burton,* ii. 241-5.) Mrs. Lynn Linton referred to Burton as a "frank agnostic," who " had systematically preached a doctrine so adverse" to Christianity, and whose memory was dishonoured by his wife's demeanour at the time of his death (*Nineteenth Century,* March, 1892, p. 461.) Lady Burton resented this charge with considerable indignation, but her own statements in *The New Review* (November, 1892) almost fully bear it out. Rev. H. R. Haweis knew Burton well and reports a conversation with him on the question of a future life :—

> Sir Richard was a very good friend of mine, and one whom I held in high esteem. Sir Richard once said, " I know nothing about my soul, I get on very well without one. It is rather hard to inflict a soul on me in the decline of my life." (*The Dead Pulpit,* p. 269.)

Burton's niece, Georgina M. Stisted, says :—

> The shock of so fatal a terminus to his illness would have daunted most Romanists desirous of effecting a death-bed conversion. It did not daunt Isabel. No sooner did she perceive that her husband's life was in danger, than she sent messengers in every direction for a priest. Mercifully, even the first to arrive, a man of peasant extraction, who had been appointed to the parish, came too late to molest one then far beyond the reach of human folly and superstition. (*The True Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton,* pp. 413-4.)

In Burton's *Selected Papers on Anthropology, etc.* (pp. 165-6), published in 1924, may be found many sarcastic references to Holy Week in Rome and its theatricals, to " the horde of harpies " that prey on visitors, the contrast between the richly decorated churches, and the crowd of beggars imploring alms " in God's name," and to the brisk trade in " holy things—images, crucifixes and rosaries, blessed by his Holiness."

Swinburne knew Burton and protested in vigorous verse against what he considered an outrage on decency committed by the " priests and soulless serfs of priests "

> who swarm
> With vulturous acclamation, loud in lies,
> About his dust while yet his dust is warm
> Who mocked as sunlight mocks their base blind eyes,
> Their godless ghost of godhead.

LORD BYRON.

No one can read Byron's poems attentively without seeing that he was not a Christian, and this view is amply corroborated by his private letters, notably the very explicit one to Hodgson, published half a century after Byron's death. Even the poet's first and chief biographer, Moore, was constrained to admit that " Lord Byron was, to the last, a sceptic."

Byron was born at Holles Street, London, on January 22nd, 1788. His life was remarkably eventful for a poet, but its history is so easily accessible, and so well known, that we need not summarise it here. His death occurred at Missolonghi on April 19th, 1824. Greece was then struggling for independence, and Byron devoted his life and fortune to her cause. His sentiments on this subject are expressed

with power and dignity in the lines written at Missolonghi on his thirty-sixth birthday. The faults of his life were many, but they were redeemed by the glory of his death.

Exposure, which his declining health was unfitted to bear, brought on a fever, and the soldier-poet of freedom died without proper attendance, far from those he loved. He conversed a good deal at first with his friend Parry, who records that " he spoke of death with great composure." The day before he expired, when his friends and attendants wept round his bed at the thought of losing him, he looked at one of them steadily, and said, half smiling, "Oh questa è una bella scena !"—Oh this is a fine scene ! After a fit of delirium, he called his faithful servant Fletcher, who offered to bring pen and paper to take down his words. " Oh no," he replied, " there is no time. Go to my sister—tell her—go to Lady Byron—you will see her, and say . . ." Here his voice became indistinct. For nearly twenty minutes he muttered to himself, but only a word now and then could be distinguished. He then said, " Now, I have told you all." Fletcher replied that he had not understood a word. " Not understand me?" exclaimed Byron, with a look of the utmost distress, " what a pity !—then it is too late; all is over." He tried to utter a few more words, but none were intelligible except "my sister—my child." After the doctors had given him a sleeping draught, he muttered, " Poor Greece !—poor town !—my poor servants ! my hour is come !—I do not care for death —but why did I not go home?—There are things that make the world dear to me : for the rest I am content to die." He spoke also of Greece, saying, " I have given her my time, my means, my health—and now I give her my life ! what could I do more?" About six o'clock in the evening he said, " Now I shall go to

sleep." He then fell into the slumber from which he never woke. At a quarter past six on the following day, he opened his eyes and immediately shut them again. The physicians felt his pulse—he was dead.[8]

His work was done. As Swinburne wrote in 1865, "A little space was allowed him to show at least an heroic purpose, and attest a high design; then, with all things unfinished before him and behind, he fell asleep after many troubles and triumphs. Few can have ever gone wearier to the grave: none with less fear." [9] The pious guardians of Westminster Abbey denied him sepulture in its holy precincts, but he found a grave at Hucknall, and "after life's fitful fever he sleeps well."

Byron's own views on the subject of death-beds were expressed in a letter to Murray, dated June 7th, 1820. "A death-bed," he wrote, "is a matter of nerves and constitution, not of religion." He also remarked that "Men died calmly before the Christian era, and since, without Christianity."

RICHARD CARLILE.

Richard Carlile was born at Ashburton, in Devonshire, on December 8th, 1790. His whole life was spent in advocating Freethought and Republicanism, and in resisting the Blasphemy Laws. His total imprisonments for the freedom of the press amounted to nine years and four months. Thirteen days before his death he penned these words: "The enemy with whom I have to grapple is one with whom no peace can be made. Idolatry will not parley; superstition

[8] *Byron's Life and Letters*, by Thomas Moore, pp. 684-688.

[9] Preface (p. 28) to a Selection from Byron's poems, 1865.

will not treat on covenant. They must be uprooted for public and individual safety." Carlile died on February 10th, 1843. He was attended in his last illness by Dr. Thomas Lawrence, the author of the once famous Lectures on Man. Wishing to be useful in death as in life, Carlile devoted his body to dissection. His wish was complied with by the family, and the post-mortem examination was recorded in the *Lancet*. The burial took place at Kensal Green Cemetery, where a clergyman insisted on reading the Church Service over his remains. " His eldest son, Richard, who represented his sentiments as well as his name, very properly protested against the proceedings, as an outrage upon the principles of his father and the wishes of the family. Of course the remonstrance was disregarded, and Richard, his brothers, and their friends left the ground." [10] After their departure, the clergyman called the great hater of priests his " dear departed brother," and declared that the rank Materialist had died " in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection."

WILLIAM KINGDON CLIFFORD.

PROFESSOR CLIFFORD died all-too early of consumption, on March 3, 1879. He was one of the gentlest and most amiable of men, and the centre of a large circle of distinguished friends. His great ability was beyond dispute; in the higher mathematics he enjoyed a European reputation. Nor was his courage less, for he never concealed his heresy, but rather proclaimed it from the housetops. A Freethinker to the heart's core, he " utterly dismissed from his thoughts, as

[10] *Life and Character of Richard Carlile*, by G. J. Holyoake.

being unprofitable or worse, all speculations on a future or unseen world"; and "as never man loved life more, so never man feared death less." He fulfilled, continues Mr. Pollock, " well and truly the great saying of Spinoza, often in his mind and on his lips; Homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat. (A free man thinks less of nothing than of death.)"[11] Clifford faced the inevitable with the utmost calmness.

> For a week he had known that it might come at any moment and looked to it steadfastly. So calmly had he received the warning which conveyed this knowledge that it seemed at the instant as if he did not understand it . . . He gave careful and exact directions as to the disposal of his works . . . More than this, his interest in the outer world, his affection for his friends and his pleasure in their pleasures, did not desert him to the very last He still followed the course of events, and asked for the public news on the morning of his death, so strongly did he hold fast his part in the common weal and in active social life.[12]

Clifford was a great loss to " the good old cause." He was a most valiant soldier of progress, cut off before a tithe of his work was accomplished.

ANACHARSIS CLOOTZ.

Among the multitude of figures in the vast panorama of the French Revolution was Jean Baptiste du Val de Grâce, known as Anacharsis Clootz. He appears several times in Carlyle's great epic. Now he introduces a deputation of foreigners of all nations to the

[11] *Lectures and Essays,* by Professor Clifford. Pollock's Introduction, p. 25.

[12] *Ibid,* p. 26.

Assembly; later he presents to the Convention "a work evincing the nullity of all religions." Finally, on March 24th, 1794, he is one of a tumbril-load of victims, nineteen in all, on the road to the guillotine. "Clootz," says Carlyle, "still with an air of polished sarcasm, endeavours to jest, to offer cheering 'arguments of Materialism'; he requested to be executed last 'in order to establish certain principles.'" [13] Clootz's biographer, Avenel, gives a fuller account of the scene. "Let me lie under the green sward," exclaimed the great Atheist, "so that I may be re-born in vegetation." "Nature," he said, "is a good mother, who loves to see her children appear and reappear in different forms. All she includes is eternal, imperishable like herself. Now let me sleep!" [14]

ANTHONY COLLINS.

ANTHONY COLLINS was one of the chief English Freethinkers of the eighteenth century. Professor Fraser calls him "this remarkable man." [15] Swift refers to him as a leading sceptic of that age. He was a barrister, born of a good Essex family in 1767, and dying on December 13, 1829. Locke, whose own character was manly and simple, was charmed by him. "He praised his love of truth and moral courage," says Professor Fraser, "as superior to almost any other he had ever known, and by his will he made him one of his executors." [16] Yet bigotry was then so rampant, that Bishop Berkeley, who, according to

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[13] *French Revolution*, III., p. 215.

[14] Georges Avenel, *Anacharsis Clootz*, II., p. 471.

[15] *Berkeley*, by A. C. Fraser, LL.D., 99.

[16] *Ibid.*

Pope, had every virtue under heaven, actually said in the *Guardian* that the author of *A Discourse on Freethinking* " deserved to be denied the common benefits of air and water." Collins afterwards engaged in controversy with the clergy, wrote against priestcraft, and debated with Dr. Samuel Clarke " about necessity and the moral nature of man, stating the arguments against human freedom with a logical force unsurpassed by any necessitarian." [17] With respect to Collins's controversy on " the soul," Professor Huxley says: " I do not think anyone can read the letters which passed between Clarke and Collins without admitting that Collins, who writes with wonderful power and closeness of reasoning, has by far the best of the argument, so far as the possible materiality of the soul goes; and that in this battle the Goliath of Freethinking overcame the champion of what was considered orthodoxy.[18] According to Berkeley, Collins had announced " that he was able to demonstrate the impossibility of God's existence," but this is probably the exaggeration of an opponent. We may be sure, however, that he was a thorough sceptic with regard to Christianity. His death is thus referred to in the *Biographia Britannica*:—

> Notwithstanding all the reproaches cast upon Mr. Collins as an enemy to religion, impartiality obliges us to remark, what is said, and generally believed to be true, upon his death-bed he declared " That, as he had always endeavoured, to the best of his abilities to serve his God, his King, and his country, so he was persuaded he was going to the place which God had designed for those who love him ": to which he added that " *The Catholic religion is to love God,*

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[17] *Ibid.*

[18] *Critiques and Addresses*, p. 324.

and to love man"; and he advised such as were about him to have a constant regard to these principles.

There is probably a good deal apocryphal in this passage, but it is worthy of notice that nothing is said about any dread of death. Another memorable fact is that Collins left his library to an opponent, Dr. Sykes. It was large and curious, and always open to men of letters. Collins was so earnest a seeker for truth, and so candid a controversialist, that he often furnished his antagonists with books to confute himself.

AUGUSTE COMTE

COMTE, the founder of Positivism, was born on January 19, 1798. The aim of his philosophy, as set forth on the title-page of his masterpiece, was to "reorganize society without God or King, by the systematic culture of Humanity." Owing to a congenital disorder of the nervous system, he was liable to occasional aberrations of mind, and he was once put under restraint. But his life was nevertheless dignified and fruitful, and the literature of social, political and religious speculation shows what a profound influence he has exercised on many of the best minds of our age.

He died on September 5th, 1857, of the painful disease of cancer in the stomach. M. Littré, his greatest disciple, thus describes his last days: "The fatal hour arrived, M. Comte, who had borne his malady with the greatest fortitude, met with no less firmness the approach of death. His bodily weakness became extreme, and he expired without pain, having around him some of his most cherished disciples." [19]

[19] E. Littré, *Auguste Comte et la Philosophie Positive*, p. 643.

CONDORCET.

MARIE-JEAN-ANTOINE-NICHOLAS, MARQUIS DE CONDORCET, was born at Ribemont in Picardy, in 1743. As early as 1764 he composed a work on the integral calculus. In 1773 he was appointed perpetual secretary of the French Academy. He was an intense admirer of Voltaire, and wrote a life of that great man. At the commencement of the Revolution he ardently embraced the popular cause. In 1791 he represented Paris in the Legislative Assembly, of which he was immediately elected secretary. It was on his motion that, in the following year, all orders of nobility were abolished. Elected by the Aisne department to the new Assembly of 1792, he was named a member of the Constitutional Committee, which also included Danton and Thomas Paine. After the execution of Louis XIV., he was opposed to the excess of the extreme party. Always showing the courage of his convictions, he soon became the victim of proscription. "He cared as little for his life," says Mr. Morley, "as Danton or St. Just cared for theirs. Instead of coming down among the men of the plain or the frogs of the Marsh, he withstood the Mountain to its face." While hiding from those who thirsted for his blood, and burdened with anxiety as to the fate of his wife and child, he wrote, without a single book to refer to, his novel and profound *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain.* Mr. Morley says that "among the many wonders of an epoch of portents this feat of intellectual abstraction is not the least amazing." Despite the odious law that whoever gave refuge to a proscribed person should suffer death, Condorcet was offered shelter by a noble-hearted woman, who said: "If you are outside the

law, we are not outside humanity." But he would not bring peril upon her house, and he went forth to his doom. Arrested at Clamart-sous-Meudon, he was conducted to prison at Bourg-la-Reine. Wounded in the foot, and exhausted with fatigue and privation, he was flung into a miserable cell. It was the 27th of March, 1794. "On the morrow," says Mr. Morley, "when the gaolers came to see him, they found him stretched upon the ground, dead and stark. So he perished—of hunger and weariness, say some; of poison ever carried by him in a ring, say others." [20] The Abbé Morellet, in his narrative of the death of Condorcet (*Mémoires,* ch. xxiv.), says that the poison was a mixture of stramonium and opium, but he adds that the surgeon described the death as due to apoplexy. In any case Condorcet died like a hero, refusing to save his life at the cost of another's danger.

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY.

CONWAY was born in Virginia, U.S.A., in 1832. The story of his life is interesting as a study in the psychology of religious experience. Originally a Methodist minister, later he became a Unitarian, and later still a Rationalist with Theistic sympathies. In 1863 he came to London, and in the same year was appointed minister of the South Place Chapel (afterwards Institute) London—an institution which now has its headquarters in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square. This ministry he carried on until 1884. During this time he gradually moved away from his theistic belief,

[20] *Miscellanies.* By John Morley. Vol. I., p. 75.

and it is easy to quote passages from his later writings and speeches which show his complete rejection of both Christianity and Theism. He rendered service to the Freethought cause by his outspoken denunciation of the intellectual dishonesty of those who give a nominal adherence to religious formularies and doctrines which they do not inwardly accept. His *Life of Thomas Paine* in two volumes appeared in 1892.

Conway died in Paris in 1907. His latest writings and utterances make it clear that up to the time of his death he took a keen interest in the progress of Freethought. "To the last I never found him despairing, never even apathetic," says Mr. J. M. Robertson (*The Life Pilgrimage of Moncur D. Conway*, p. 69.)

ROBERT COOPER.

ROBERT COOPER was Secretary to Robert Owen and editor of the London *Investigator*. His lectures on the Bible and the Immortality of the Soul, and his *Holy Scriptures Analysed*, were well known in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. His pamphlet, *Deathbed Repentance*, 1852, is one of the earliest detailed exposures of the lies fabricated by Christians in regard to the last days of prominent Freethinkers. He was a thorough-going materialist and never wavered in this philosophy. He died on May 3, 1868. The *National Reformer* of July 26, 1868, contains the following note written by Cooper shortly before his death:—

> At a moment when the hand of death is suspended over me, my theological opinions remain unchanged; months of deep and silent cogitation, under the

> pressure of long suffering, have confirmed rather than modified them. I calmly await, therefore, all risk attached to these convictions. Conscious that, if mistaken, I have always been sincere, I apprehend no disabilities for impressions I cannot resist.

Robert Cooper was not related to Thomas Cooper, to whose lectures on God and a Future Life he wrote a reply in 1856.

D'ALEMBERT.

D'ALEMBERT, the founder of the great *Encyclopædia,* the friend of Voltaire and the colleague of Diderot, was born on November 16, 1717. His death occurred on October 29, 1783. His opinions on religion were those of a firm Agnostic. "As for the existence of a supreme intelligence," he wrote to Frederick the Great, "I think that those who deny it advance far more than they can prove, and scepticism is the only reasonable course." He goes on to say, however, that experience invincibly proves the materiality of the "soul." [21] D'Alembert's last moments were in harmony with his philosophy. According to his friend and executor, Condorcet, his last days were spent amidst a numerous company, listening to their conversation, and sometimes enlivening it with pleasantries or stories. "He only," says Condorcet, "was able to think of other subjects than himself, and to give himself to gaiety and amusement." [22]

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[21] J. Morley, *Diderot,* Vol. II., p. 160.

[22] *Œuvres Philosophiques de D'Alembert,* Vol. I., p. 131. An. XIII (1805).

DANTON.

DANTON, called by Carlyle the Titan of the Revolution, and certainly its greatest figure after Mirabeau, was guillotined on April 5, 1794. He was only thirty-five, but he made a name that will live as long as the history of France. With all his faults, says Carlyle, "he was a Man; fiery-real, from the great fire-bosom of Nature herself." Some of his phrases are like pyramids, standing sublime above the drifting sand of human speech. It was he who advised "daring, and still daring, and ever daring." It was he who cried, "The coalesced kings of Europe threaten us, and as our gage of battle we fling before them the head of a king." It was he who exclaimed, in a rapture of patriotism, "Let my name be blighted, so that France be free." And what a saying was that, when his friends urged him to flee from the Terror, "One does not carry his country with him at the sole of his shoe!"

Danton would not flee. "They dare not" arrest him, he said; but he was soon a prisoner in the Luxembourg. "What is your name and abode?" they asked him at the tribunal. "My name is Danton," he answered, "a name tolerably known in the Revolution: my abode will soon be Annihilation; but I shall live in the Pantheon of History." Replying to his infamous Indictment, his magnificent voice "reverberates with the roar of a lion in the toils." The President rings his bell, enjoining calmness, says Carlyle, in a vehement manner, "What is it to thee how I defend myself?" cries Danton; "the right of dooming me is thine always. The voice of a man

speaking for his honour and life may well drown the jingling of thy bell!"

On the way to the guillotine Danton bore himself proudly. Poor Camille Desmoulins struggled and writhed in the cart, which was surrounded by a howling mob. "Calm, my friend," said Danton, "heed not that vile canaille." Herault de Séchelles, whose turn it was to die first, tried to embrace his friend, but the executioners prevented him. "Fools," said Danton, "you cannot prevent our heads from meeting in the basket." At the foot of the scaffold the thought of home flashed through his mind. "O my wife," he exclaimed, "my well-beloved, I shall never see thee more then." But recovering himself, he said, "Danton, no weakness!" Looking the executioner in the face, he cried with his great voice, "You will show my head to the crowd; it is worth showing; you don't see the like in these days." The next minute that head, the one that might have guided France best, was severed from his body by the knife of the guillotine. What a man this Danton was! With his Herculean form, his huge black head, his mighty voice, his passionate nature, his fiery courage, his poignant wit, his geniality, and his freedom from cant, he was a splendid and unique figure. An Atheist, he perished in trying to arrest bloodshed. Robespierre, the Deist, continued the bloodshed till it drowned him. The two men were as diverse in nature as in creed, and Danton killed by Robespierre, as Courtois said, was Pyrrhus killed by a woman!

[The reader may consult Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Book vi., Ch. ii., and Jules Claretie's *Camille Desmoulins et les Dantonistes*, Ch. vi.]

CHARLES ROBERT DARWIN.

DARWIN, the great evolutionist, whose fame is as wide as civilization, was born at Shrewsbury in 1809. Intended for a clergyman, he became a naturalist; and although his bump of reverence was said to be large enough for ten priests, he passed by gentle stages into the most extreme scepticism. From the age of forty he was, to use his own words, a complete disbeliever in Christianity. Further reflection showed him that Nature bore no evidence of design, and the prevalence of struggle and suffering in the world compelled him to reject the doctrine of infinite benevolence. He professed himself an Agnostic, regarding the problem of the universe as beyond our solution. "For myself," he wrote, "I do not believe in any revelation. As for a future life, every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities." Robert Lewins, M.D., knew Darwin personally, and had discussed this question with him. Darwin was much less reticent to Lewins than he had shown himself in a letter to Haeckel. In answer to a direct question "as to the bearing of his researches on the existence of an *anima,* or soul in man, he distinctly stated that, in his opinion, a vital or spiritual principle, apart from inherent somatic (bodily) energy, had no more *locus standi* in the human than in the other races of the animal kingdom" (*What is Religion?* by Constance Naden, p. 52). Yet the Church buried him in Westminster Abbey "in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection."

Darwin died on April 19, 1882, in the plenitude of his fame, having outlived the opposition of ignorance

and bigotry, and witnessed the triumph of his ideas. His last moments are described by his eldest son Francis :—

> No special change occurred during the beginning of April, but on Saturday 15th he was seized with giddiness while sitting at dinner in the evening, and fainted in an attempt to reach his sofa. On the 17th he was again better, and in my temporary absence recorded for me the progress of an experiment in which I was engaged. During the night of April 18th, about a quarter to twelve, he had a severe attack and passed into a faint, from which he was brought back to consciousness with great difficulty. He seemed to recognize the approach of death, and said *"I am not the least afraid to die."* All the next morning he suffered from terrible nausea and faintness, and hardly rallied before the end came.

No one in his senses would have supposed that he was " afraid to die," yet it is well to have the words recorded by the son who was present. In the second edition of *Infidel Deathbeds* this notice ended with the words : "Pious ingenuity will be unable to traduce the deathbed of Charles Darwin." But " pious ingenuity " is not easily slain. Sir Francis Darwin as recently as January, 1916, had to refute a lying story about his father's agonizing deathbed, and the story cropped up again, with embellishments, in *The Churchman's Magazine* for March, 1925.

ERASMUS DARWIN.

Erasmus Darwin, the physician, and grandfather of the great Charles Darwin, was born on December 12, 1731. His death took place on April 10, 1802.

While driving from patient to patient, Erasmus Darwin composed a lengthy poem, in which he anticipated many of the ideas of modern evolution. His scepticism was strongly pronounced. He believed in God, but not in Christianity. Even the Unitarians were too orthodox for him; indeed, he called Unitarianism a feather-bed to catch a falling Christian. His death was singularly peaceful. "At about seven o'clock," said his grandson, "he was seized with a violent shivering fit, and went into the kitchen to warm himself; he retired to his study, lay on the sofa, became faint and cold, and was moved into an arm-chair, where, without pain or emotion of any kind, he expired a little before nine o'clock." [23] A few years before, writing to a friend, he said, "When I think of dying it is always without pain or fear."

DELAMBRE.

Jean Baptist Joseph Delambre, one of the most distinguished French astronomers, was born at Amiens on September 19, 1749. He was a pupil of Lalande, and like him an Atheist. He died, after a long and painful illness, on August 18, 1822. In announcing his death, a pious journal wrote: "It appears that this *savant* had the misfortune to be an unbeliever. We wish we could announce that sickness had brought him back to the faith; but we have been unable to obtain any information to that effect." [24] Like Lalande, the dying astronomer was faithful to the convictions of his life.

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[23] Charles Darwin, *Life of Erasmus Darwin*, p. 126.

[24] *L'Ami de la Religion et du Roi*, tome xxxiii., p. 111.

DENIS DIDEROT.

RARELY has the world seen a more fecund mind than Diderot's. Voltaire called him *Pantophile,* for everything came within the sphere of his mental activity. The twenty volumes of his collected writings contain the germ-ideas of nearly all the best thought of our age, and his anticipations of Darwinism are nothing less than extraordinary. He had not Voltaire's lightning wit and supreme grace of style, nor Rousseau's passionate and subtle eloquence; but he was superior to either of them in depth and solidity, and he was surprisingly ahead of his time, not simply in his treatment of religion, but also in his view of social and political problems. His historical monument is the great *Encyclopædia.* For twenty years he laboured on this colossal enterprise, assisted by the best heads in France, but harassed and thwarted by the government and the clergy.

Diderot tasted imprisonment in 1749, and many times afterwards his liberty was menaced. Nothing, however, could intimidate or divert him from his task; and he never quailed when the ferocious beast of persecution, having tasted the blood of meaner victims, turned an evil and ravenous eye on him.

Carlyle's brilliant essay on Diderot is ludicrously unjust. The Scotch puritan was quite unable to judge the French Atheist. A greater than Carlyle wrote: "Diderot is Diderot, a peculiar individuality; whoever holds him or his doings cheaply is a Philistine, and the name of them is legion." Goethe's dictum outweighs that of his disciple.

Born at Langres in 1713, Diderot died at Paris 1784. His life was long, active and fruitful.[25] His conversational powers were great, and showed the fertility of his genius. "When I recall Diderot," wrote Meister, "the immense variety of his ideas, the amazing multiplicity of his knowledge, the rapid flight, the warmth, the impetuous tumult of his imagination, all the charm and all the disorder of his conversation, I venture to liken his character to Nature herself, exactly as he used to conceive her—rich, fertile, abounding in germs of every sort, gentle and fierce, simple and majestic, worthy and sublime, but without any dominating principle, without a master and without a God."

Chequered as Diderot's life had been, his closing years were full of peace and comfort. Superstition was mortally wounded, the Church was terrified, and it was clear that the change the philosophers had worked for was at hand. As John Morley says, "the press literally teemed with pamphlets, treatises, poems, histories, all shouting from the house-tops open destruction to beliefs which fifty years before were actively protected against so much as a whisper in the closet. Every form of literary art was seized and turned into an instrument in the remorseless attack on *L'Infâme*."

In the Spring of 1784 Diderot was attacked by what he felt was his last illness. Dropsy set in, and in a few months the end came. A fortnight before his death he was removed from the upper floor in the Rue Taranne, which he had occupied for thirty years, to

[25] In *Diderot and the Encyclopœdists*, Vol. I., pp. 39-40, John Morley gives an interesting description of Diderot's personal appearance.

palatial rooms provided for him by the Czarina in the Rue de Richelieu. Growing weaker every day he was still alert in mind :—

> He did all he could to cheer the people around him, and amused himself and them by arranging his pictures and his books. In the evening, to the last, he found strength to converse on science and philosophy to the friends who were eager as ever for the last gleanings of his prolific intellect. In the last conversation that his daughter heard him carry on, his last words were the pregnant aphorism that the first step towards philosophy is incredulity.
>
> On the evening of the 30th July, 1784, he sat down to table, and at the end of the meal took an apricot. His wife, with kind solicitude, remonstrated. *Mais quel diable de mal veux-tu que cela me fasse?* (How the deuce can that hurt me?) he said, and ate the apricot. Then he rested his elbow on the table, trifling with some sweetmeats. His wife asked him a question; on receiving no answer, she looked up and saw he was dead. He had died as the Greek poets say that men died in the golden age—they passed away as if mastered by sleep.[26]

Grimm gives a slightly different account of Diderot's death, omitting the apricot, and stating that his words to his wife were, " It is long since I have eaten with so much relish." [27] The curé of St. Roch, in whose parish he died, had scrupled at first about burying him, on account of his sceptical reputation and the doctrines expounded in his writings; but the priest's scruples were overcome, partly by a present of "fifteen or eighteen thousand livres."

According to Morley, an effort was made to convert Diderot, or at least to wring from him something like a retractation :—

[26] Morley, Vol. II., pp. 259-260.

[27] Quoted from the *Revue Retrospective* in Assézat's complete edition of Diderot.

The priest of St. Sulpice, the centre of the philosophic quarter came to visit him three or four times a week, hoping to achieve at least the semblance of a conversion. Diderot did not encourage conversation on theology, but when pressed he did not refuse it. One day when they found, as two men of sense will always find, that they had ample common ground in matters of morality and good works, the priest ventured to hint that an exposition of such excellent maxims, accompanied by a slight retraction of Diderot's previous works, would have a good effect on the world. "I dare say it would, monsieur le curé, but confess that I should be acting an impudent lie." And no word of retractation was ever made.[28]

If judging men by the company they keep is a safe rule, we need have no doubt as to the sentiments which Diderot entertained to the end. Grimm tells us that on the morning of the very day he died "he conversed for a long time and with the greatest freedom with his friend the Baron D'Holbach," the famous author of the *System of Nature,* compared with whom, says Morley, "the most eager Nescient or Denier to be found in the ranks of the assailants of theology in our own day is timorous and moderate." These men were the two most earnest Atheists of their generation. Both were genial, benevolent, and conspicuously generous. D'Holbach was learned, eloquent, and trenchant; and Diderot, in Comte's opinion, was the greatest genius of the eighteenth century.

ETIENNE DOLET.

Etienne (Stephen) Dolet, the great French printer, whose name is inseparably connected with the Revival of Learning, was hanged and burnt at Lyons on

[28] Morley, Vol. II., p. 258.

August 3, 1546. The Church gave him the martyr's crown on his thirty-seventh birthday. He was a heretic, and he paid the penalty exacted from all who dared to think for themselves. As Mr. Christie remarks, he was "neither a Protestant nor a Catholic." His contemporaries were fully persuaded of his Atheism. "Philosophy has alone the right," says the great French historian, "to claim on its side the illustrious victim of the Place Maubert." [29]

Dolet got his first taste of persecution in 1533, when he was thrown into prison for denouncing in a Latin oration the burning alive of Jean de Cartuce at Toulouse. During the remaining thirteen years of his life he was five times imprisoned, and nearly half his days were spent in confinement.

Sentence of death for blasphemy was pronounced on Dolet in the *Chambre Ardente* at Paris on August 2, 1546. He was condemned to be hanged, and then burnt with his books on the Place Maubert; and his widow and children were beggared by the confiscation of his goods to the king. It was also ordered that he should be put to the torture before his execution, and questioned about his companions; and "if the said Dolet shall cause any scandal or utter any blasphemy, his tongue shall be cut out, and he shall be burnt alive." The next day he met his doom. He was hanged first, and then (for they were not very particular), probably while he still breathed, the faggots were lighted, and Dolet and his books were consumed in the flames. It is said that instead of a prayer he uttered a pun in Latin—*Non dolet ipse Dolet, sed pia turba dolet*—"Dolet himself does not grieve, but the pious crowd grieves." Yet the confessor who attended him at the stake invented the

[29] Henri Martin, *Histoire de France*, Vol. II., p. 343.

miserable falsehood that the martyr had acknowledged his errors. "I do not believe a word of it," wrote the great Erasmus, "it is the usual story which these people invent after the death of their victims." Dolet's real sentiments are expressed in the noble *cantique*, full of resignation and courage, which he composed in prison when death was imminent.[30] [Authorities: R. C. Christie, *Etienne Dolet*, Joseph Boulmier, *Etienne Dolet.*]

GEORGE ELIOT.

MARIAN EVANS, afterwards Mrs. Lewes, and finally Mrs. Cross, was one of the greatest writers of the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The noble works of fiction she published under the pseudonym of George Eliot are known to all. Her earliest writing was done for the *Westminster Review*, a magazine of marked sceptical tendency. Her inclination to Freethought is further shown by her translation of Strauss's famous *Life of Jesus* and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*, the latter being the work of a profound Atheist. George Eliot was,

[30] Here are the last two verses in the fine old French :—

De patience ung bon cueur jouyassant,
Dessoubz le mal jamais n'est flechissant;
Se desolant ou en riens gemissant,
Tousjours vaincqueur.
Sus, mon esprit, monstrés vous de tel cueur;
Vostre asseurance, au besoigng soit congneue;
Tout gentil cueur, tout constant bellicqueur,
Jusqu 'a la mort sa force a maintenue!

Rough translation :—"A good heart, sustained with patience, never bends under evil, bewails or moans, but is always victor. Courage, my soul, and show such a heart; let your confidence be seen in trial; every noble heart, every constant warrior, maintains his fortitude even unto death."

to some extent, a disciple of Comte, and reckoned a member of the Society of Positivists. Mr. Myers tells us that in the last conversation he had with her at Cambridge, they talked of God, Immortality and Duty, and she gravely remarked how hypothetical was the first, how improbable was the second, and how sternly real the last. Whenever in her novels she speaks in the first person she breathes the same sentiment. Her biography has been written by her second husband, who says that "her long illness in the autumn had left her no power to rally. She passed away about ten o'clock at night on the 22nd of December, 1880. She died, as she would herself have chosen to die, without protracted pain, and with every faculty brightly vigorous." [31] Her body lies in the next grave to that of George Henry Lewes at Highgate Cemetery; her spirit, the product of her life has, in her own words, joined "the choir invisible, whose music is the gladness of the world."

FRANCISCO FERRER.

FERRER was born in 1859. He founded his "Modern School," which was purely secular, at Barcelona in September, 1901. "No priest and no religion, no prayers, and no devotions inspired by any creed of supernaturalistic affinities, found shelter under its auspices." This roused the bitter antagonism of the clergy, who stirred up the authorities against him. Ferrer was imprisoned and his property confiscated; but new schools were established in

[31] *Life and Letters of George Eliot*, by J. W. Cross, Vol. III., p. 439.

many localities. On May 31, 1906, a bomb explosion at Madrid furnished the pretext for serious charges against him. Three years later another pretext was furnished by a civil disturbance in Barcelona. He was falsely charged with complicity in the rising and condemned to be shot, a sentence which was carried out on October 12, 1909. (See the articles by Mr. William Heaford in the *Freethinker,* May 14, and June 7, 1931).

LUDWIG ANDREAS FEUERBACH.

FEUERBACH was born in Bavaria in 1804. After studying theology for two years he abandoned it to devote himself to philosophy. In 1828 he became a lecturer in the University of Erlangen, but soon had to retire owing to the offence caused by his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality,* in which he attacks the belief in an immortal "soul." His *Essence of Christianity* appeared in 1841, and the English translation by George Eliot in 1853. Brewin Grant, of considerable notoriety at one time as a Christian of the evangelical type, said: "Goethe, Feuerbach, R. B. Sheridan, all died in despair." We happen, however, to know in detail the story of Feuerbach's last days. His friend, Carl Scholl, who delivered an address at his grave, visited him every morning during his last illness. Scholl says that Feuerbach was suffering from bronchitis and endured severe pain with great fortitude. He died on September 13, 1872, "in a slumber so peaceful that those present scarcely noticed that he was dead." (Scholl, *Dem Andenken Ludwig Feuerbachs,* 1872, pp. 13-16.)

GEORGE WILLIAM FOOTE.

Foote was born in Plymouth on January 11, 1850. He was brought up in the Anglican communion, and in early youth became "converted." But he was essentially of the number of those who are destined by Nature to examine the grounds of their opinions on religion or any other subject. Before he was eighteen he rejected as untenable the claims made on behalf of the Bible. In 1868 he came to London, where he joined the Young Men's Secular Association and was soon working energetically for Freethought and Republicanism. Both as a speaker and as a writer he early showed a power of thought and expression which, combined with utter fearlessness, was to make him later so great an asset to the Freethought cause. "Free Lance," writing on "Secular Progress in 1871," in the *National Secular Society's Almanack*, 1872 (p. 24), said: "We have also two young lecturers of great promise, Mr. G. Bishop and Mr. G. W. Foote." During the decade 1870-1880 Foote contributed to the *Secular Chronicle* and the *National Reformer*, founded, in conjunction with G. J. Holyoake, the *Secularist*, edited the *Liberal*, and wrote a number of pamphlets, among which may be mentioned: *Heroes and Martyrs of Freethought*, and *God, the Soul and A Future State: a Reply to Thomas Cooper*. In 1881 he established the *Freethinker*, a journal that was destined to become a powerful factor in spreading Freethought throughout England. From 1883 to 1887 he edited *Progress*, which contained many articles of high literary merit.

Though the prosecutions of Foote for "blasphemous libels" published in the *Freethinker*, constitute an important chapter in the story of his life, it is impossible here to enter into details concerning

them. He was served with his first summons in July, 1882, and at the Court of Queen's Bench was compelled to find securities for £600. The next trial arose out of the illustrations in the Christmas number of the same year and had more serious consequences. For this offence he was, in March, 1883, sentenced by Judge North, a Roman Catholic, to twelve months' imprisonment. Nearly two months later Foote was tried again on the first indictment, before Lord Chief Justice Coleridge, and defended himself in a speech which is now one of the classics in the literature of its kind. For a detailed account of these prosecutions the reader is referred to Foote's *Prisoner for Blasphemy*, and the *Defence of Free Speech*. The latter has just been republished by the Pioneer Press, and contains an interesting Introduction by Mr. H. Cutner.

Apart from his thirty-five years' work on the *Freethinker*, during the whole of this period Foote was in various other ways—writing books and pamphlets, lecturing and debating—serving the cause to which he had early decided to devote his life. In 1882 appeared *The God the Christians Swear by*, during Charles Bradlaugh's parliamentary struggle, *Blasphemy no crime*, and *Death's Test*, afterwards enlarged into *Infidel Deathbeds*. The last, like *A Lie in Five Chapters?* (1892), in which he ran to earth the story of a "converted Atheist," which the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes had started, was more than an exposure of "lying for the glory of God." Foote discerned as clearly as any man ever did the influence of superstitious beliefs on personality, and the fatal ease with which they are made to serve the purposes of the professional soul-saver. The *Bible Handbook*, in which W. P. Ball collaborated, appeared in 1885, and *Crimes of*

Christianity in 1887. In producing the latter, which is a veritable store-house of historical facts for the Freethought propagandist, he had the assistance of his life-long friend, J. M. Wheeler. *Rome or Atheism* (1892) shows that power of going straight to the point which characterized all Foote's work. It also shows exactly where he himself stood. The Newman brothers are made the text for a keen analysis of the Roman Catholic's " certitude " and the Protestant's " right to private judgment "; the disintegration of Protestantism is seen to be inevitable; and the field will be left to the two great protagonists who already " march steadily forward to their Armageddon." His views on death and a future life are concisely expressed in " The Gospel of Secularism," contributed to *Religious Systems of the World*. The Secularist, he says, will give no assent to any proposition of whose truth he is not assured, and " declines to traffic in supernatural hopes and fears."

Foote appreciated every great piece of literature, and his knowledge of ancient and modern writers, and of ecclesiastical history, was almost encyclopædic. Some of his finest literary criticism may be found in *Shakespeare and Other Literary Essays*. (Pioneer Press, 1929.)

Ever since Foote entered upon his campaign in London a large proportion of his time was spent in lectures and debates in different parts of Great Britain. He was a powerful speaker, clear and logical, at times very witty, and in his perorations rising to heights of real oratory.

In 1890 he succeeded Bradlaugh as President of the National Secular Society—a position which he held for twenty-five years. Through his instrumentality The Secular Society, Limited, was formed in 1898 : it

affords legal security to the acquisition, by bequest or otherwise, of funds for Secular purposes. The decision of the House of Lords in the Bowman case makes this security absolute.

Foote died on October 17, 1915. The details of his last illness and death are related in the *Freethinker* of October 31, 1915, by Mr. Chapman Cohen, who speaks with full knowledge of the facts:—

> To me it will always be some consolation that he died as he would have wished—in harness . . . When I saw him on the Friday (two days) before his death he said, "I have had another setback, but I am a curious fellow and may get all right again." But he looked the fact of death in the face with the same courage and determination that he faced Judge North many years ago. A few hours before he died he said calmly to those around him, "I am dying." And when the end came his head dropped back on the pillow, and with a quiet sigh, as of one falling to sleep, he passed away.

FREDERICK THE GREAT.

FREDERICK THE GREAT, the finest soldier of his age, the maker of Prussia, and therefore the founder of modern Germany, was born in 1712. His life forms the theme of Carlyle's masterpiece. Notoriously a disbeliever in Christianity, as his writings and correspondence attest, he loved to surround himself with Freethinkers, the most conspicuous of whom was Voltaire. When the great French heretic died, Frederick pronounced his eulogium before the Berlin Academy, denouncing "the imbecile priests," and declaring that "the best destiny they can look for is that they and their vile artifices will remain forever buried in the darkness of oblivion, while the fame

of Voltaire will increase from age to age, and transmit his name to immortality."

When the old king was on his death-bed, one of his subjects, solicitous about his immortal soul, sent him a letter full of pious advice. "Let this," he said, "be answered civilly; the intention of the writer is good." Shortly after, on August 17, 1786, Frederick died in his own fashion. Carlyle says:—

> For the most part he was unconscious, never more than half conscious. As the wall clock above his head struck eleven, he asked: "What o'clock?" "Eleven," answered they. "At four," murmured he, "I will arise." One of his dogs sat on its stool near him; about midnight he noticed it shivering for cold: "Throw a quilt over it," said or beckoned he; that, I think, was his last completely conscious utterance. Afterwards, in a severe choking fit, getting at last rid of the phlegm, he said, "*La montagne est passée nous irons mieux*—We are on the hill, we shall go better now."[32]

Better it was. The pain was over, and the brave old king, who had wrestled with all Europe and thrown it, succumbed quietly to the inevitable defeat which awaits us all.

LEON GAMBETTA.

GAMBETTA was the greatest French orator and statesman of his age. He was one of those splendid and potent figures who redeem nations from commonplace. To him, more than to any other man, the present Republic owes its existence. He played deeply for it in the great game of life and death after Sedan, and by his titantic organization of the national defence he made it impossible for Louis

[32] *Frederick the Great*, Vol. VI., p. 694, edition, 1869.

Napoleon to reseat himself on the throne with the aid of German bayonets. Again, in 1877, he saved the Republic he loved so well from the monarchial conspirators. He defeated their base attempt to subvert a nation's liberties, but the struggle sapped his enormous vitality, which had already been impaired by the terrible labours of his Dictatorship. He died at the early age of forty-four, having exhausted his strength in fighting for freedom.

Like almost every eminent Republican, Gambetta was a Freethinker. As Mr. Frederic Harrison says, "he systematically and formally repudiated any kind of acceptance of theology." During his lifetime he never entered a Church, even when attending a marriage or a funeral, but stopped short at the door, and let who would go inside and listen to the mummery of the priest. In his own expressive words, he declined to be "rocked asleep by the myths of childish religions." He professed himself an admirer and a disciple of Voltaire—*l'admirateur et le disciple de Voltaire*. Every member of his ministry was a Freethinker, and one of them, the eminent scientist Paul Bert, a militant Atheist. Speaking at a public meeting not long before his death, Gambetta called Comte the greatest thinker of this century; that Comte who proposed to "reorganize society, without God and without king, by the systematic cultus of humanity."

When John Stuart Mill died, a Christian journal, which died itself a few weeks after, declared he had gone to hell, and wished all his friends, and disciples would follow him. Several pious prints expressed similar sentiments with regard to Gambetta. Passing by the English papers, let us look at a few French ones. The Duc de Broglie's organ, naturally anxious to insult the statesman who had so signally beaten

him, said that "he died suddenly after hurling defiance at God." The *Pays*, edited by that pious bully, Paul de Cassagnac, said—"He dies, poisoned by his own blood. He set himself up against God. He has fallen. It is fearful. But it is just."

These tasteful exhibitions of Christian charity show that Gambetta lived and died a Freethinker. Yet the sillier sort of Christians have not scrupled to insinuate and even argue, that he was secretly a believer. One asinine priest, M. Feuillet des Conches, formerly Vicar of Notre Dame des Victoires, and then honorary Chamberlain to the Pope, stated in the London *Times* that, about two years before his death, Gambetta came to his church with a brace of big wax tapers which he offered in memory of his mother. He also added that the great orator knelt before the Virgin, dipped his finger in holy water, and made the sign of the cross. Was there ever a more absurd story? Gambetta was a remarkable looking man, and extremely well known. He could not have entered a church unobserved, and had he done so, the story would have gone round Paris the next day. Yet nobody heard of it till after his death. Either the priest mistook some portly dark man for Gambetta, or he was guilty of a pious fraud.

According to another story, Gambetta said "I am lost," when the doctors told him he could not recover. But the phrase *Je suis perdu* has no theological significance. Nothing is more misleading than a literal translation. Gambetta simply meant "It is all over then." This monstrous perversion of a simple phrase could only have arisen from sheer malice or gross ignorance of French.

While lying on his death-bed Gambetta listened to Rabelais, Molière, and other favourite but not very pious authors, read aloud by a young student who

adored him. Almost his last words, as recorded in the *Times,* were these—" Well, I have suffered so much, it will be a deliverance." The words are calm, collected, and truthful. There is no rant and no quailing. It is the natural language of a strong man confronting Death after long agony. Shortly after he breathed his last. No priest administered " the consolations of religion," and he expressly ordered that he should be buried without religious rites.

GARIBALDI.

GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI'S name is a household word in every civilized country. His romantic life and superb achievements are too well known to need any recital in these pages. The Lion of Caprera found the priests the greatest enemies of his beloved Italy, and he hated them accordingly. " The priest," he says in the preface to his *Memoirs,* "the priest is the personification of falsehood, the liar is a thief, and the thief an assassin." [33] His English biographer, Theodore Bent, admits that in his old age he grew more and more sceptical. " One of his laconic letters of 1880," he says, " illustrates this. It was as follows: ' Dear friends,—Man has created God, not God man. Yours ever, Garibaldi.' "

We have no account of Garibaldi's last moments, but he died daily in his crippled and helpless old age, and his cheerful fortitude was known to all. He desired his body to be cremated, and gave strict orders that no priest should officiate at his funeral. He also had his sarcophagus built at Caprera, but the family yielded to the wish of the Government, and he was buried at Rome.

[33] Garibaldi, *Memorie Autobiografiche,* p. 2.

ISAAC GENDRE.

THE controversy over the death of this Swiss Freethinker was summarized in the London *Echo* of July 29, 1881:—

> A second case of death-bed conversion of an eminent Liberal to Roman Catholicism, suggested probably by that of the great French philologist Littré, has passed the round of the Swiss papers. A few days ago the veteran leader of the Freiburg Liberals, M. Isaac Gendre, died. The *Ami du Peuple,* the organ of the Freiburg Ultramontanes, immediately set afloat the sensational news that when M. Gendre found that his last hour was approaching, he sent his brother to fetch a priest, in order that the last sacraments might be administered to him, and the evil which he had done during his life by his persistent Liberalism might be atoned by his repentance at the eleventh hour. This brother, M. Alexandre Gendre, now writes to the paper stating that there is not one word of truth in this story What possible benefit can any Church derive from the invention of such tales? Doubtless there is a credulous residuum which believes that there must be "some truth" in anything which has once appeared in print.

It might be added that many people readily believe what pleases them, and that a lie which has a good start is very hard to run down.

EDWARD GIBBON.

EDWARD GIBBON, greatest of modern historians, was born at Putney, near London, on April 27, 1737. His monumental work, the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* which Carlyle called "the splendid

bridge from the old world to the new," is universally known and admired. To have your name mentioned by Gibbon, said Thackeray, is like having it written on the dome of St. Peter's, which is seen by pilgrims from all parts of the earth. Twenty years of his life were devoted to his colossal History, which incidentally conveys his opinion of many problems. His views on Christianity are indicated in his famous fifteenth chapter, which is a masterpiece of grave and temperate irony. When Gibbon wrote that " it was not in this world that the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful," every sensible reader understood his meaning.

Gibbon did not long survive the completion of his great work. The last volumes of the *Decline and Fall* were published on May 8, 1788, and he died on January 14, 1794. His malady was dropsy. After being twice tapped in November, he removed to the house of his devoted friend, Lord Sheffield. A week before he expired he was obliged for the sake of the highest medical attendance, to return to his lodgings in St. James's Street, London. The following account of his last moments was written by Lord Sheffield :—

> During the evening he complained much of his stomach, and of a feeling of nausea. Soon after nine he took his opium draught and went to bed. About ten he complained of much pain, and desired that warm napkins might be applied to his stomach. He almost incessantly expressed a sense of pain till about four o'clock in the morning, when he said he found his stomach much easier. About seven the servant asked whether he should send for Mr. Farquhar (the doctor). He answered, No; that he was as well as the day before. At about half-past eight he got out of bed, and said he was " plus adroit "

than he had been for three months past, and got into bed again without assistance, better than usual. About nine he said he would rise. The servant, however, persuaded him to remain in bed till Mr. Farquhar, who was expected at eleven, should come. Till about that hour he spoke with great facility. Mr. Farquhar came at the time appointed, and he was then visibly dying. When the *valet-de-chambre* returned, after attending Mr. Farquhar out of the room, Mr. Gibbon said, "Pour-quoi est ce que vous me quittez?" (Why do you leave me?) This was about half-past eleven. At twelve o'clock he drank some brandy and water from a teapot, and desired his favourite servant to stay with him. These were the last words he pronounced articulately. To the last he preserved his senses; and when he could no longer speak, his servant having asked a question, he made a sign to show that he understood him. He was quite tranquil, and did not stir, his eyes half shut. About a quarter before one he ceased to breathe. The *valet-de-chambre* observed that *he did not, at any time, evince the least sign of alarm or apprehension of death.*—(*Last Days of Gibbon,* in Milman's edition of Gibbon, Vol. I., Introduction.)

James Cotter Morison, in his admirable monograph on Gibbon, which forms a volume of Macmillan's "English Men of Letters" series, quotes the whole of this passage with the exception of the last sentence. In our opinion the words we have italicized are the most important in the extract, and should not have been withheld.

WILLIAM GODWIN.

WILLIAM GODWIN, the author of *Political Justice* and the father-in-law of Shelley, was born on March 3, 1756, and died on April 7, 1836. Only a few days

before his death he wrote to his daughter, Mrs. Shelley, as follows:—

> I leave behind me a manuscript, in a considerable state of forwardness for the press, entitled, *The Genius of Christianity Unveiled: in a Series of Essays*. I am most unwilling that this, the concluding work of a long life, and written, as I believe, in the full maturity of my understanding, should be consigned to oblivion. It has been the main object of my life, since I attained to years of discretion, to do my part to free the human mind from slavery. I adjure you therefore, or whomsoever else into whose hands these papers may fall, not to allow them to be consigned to oblivion.

Mrs Shelley seems to have disregarded this solemn adjuration, for the work was not published till 1873, when it was issued by Kegan Paul, to whose *Life of William Godwin* we are indebted.

GOETHE.

JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE was born in Frankfort-on-the-Main, on August 28, 1749, and died on March 22, 1832. Throughout the civilized world there are few places where the centenary of his death was not commemorated last year. Goethe's hostility to everything fundamental in Christian theology was unyielding, and continued from about his seventeenth year to the end of his long life. Heine, in his *De l'Allemagne,* notices Goethe's "vigorous heathen nature" and his "militant antipathy to Christianity," and on the Continent hardly anyone would impugn the accuracy of this statement. As a young man his antagonism to the historic faith caused a marked estrangement between him and some of his

friends. In 1788, after his return from his prolonged stay in Italy, he openly declared himself a Pagan whose ideals and world-view accorded largely with those of Lucretius. Some of his letters to Lavater, Jacobi, Schiller and Zelter, contain unsparing criticism of Christianity and the claims made for it.

Goethe's "truly Julian hatred of Christianity" became less intense with advancing years; but throughout life he rejected its cardinal doctrines on intellectual grounds and regarded some of them as serious hindrances to the growth of personality. Christianity's attitude to Nature, the doctrine of total depravity, the cult of sorrow and its extremely unfavourable influence on art, and the orthodox scheme of salvation generally—all these elements of the faith strongly repelled Goethe.

In his later years he avowed to Eckermann, a kind of German Boswell who has left us in his *Conversations with Goethe* many interesting notes on the poet and his Weimar circle of friends, that the name which he would prefer to all others was *Befreier* ("liberator"). Only eleven days before his death, writing to Eckermann, he said that Biblical questions can be viewed from two standpoints, either as a study in religious origins or from the standpoint of the Church, which, feeble and transitory as it is, will continue as long as there are weak human beings in existence to need her good offices. In his letters to Zelter, the musician, one of the dearest of all his friends—Goethe's last letters, written after he had entered his 'eighties—are numerous passages showing his repugnance to Christianity's low estimate of human nature. His last letter to Zelter, a long one dated March 11, 1832, does not contain a word directly bearing on religion, but near the end there is a remark so Goethean to the core that it deserves quota-

tion: "It is strange that the English, the French, and now the Germans, too, like to express themselves incomprehensibly, just as others like to listen to what is incomprehensible." Again and again in reading Goethe we note this detestation of obscurantism, of that verbiage which expressed nothing real, and which he was never weary of arraigning as one of the baneful influences of his time.

Goethe as a thinker and investigator in the domain of natural science has been the subject of interesting dissertations by Helmholtz and Virchow. The notion of evolution, in its broadest aspect, had taken complete possession of him.

It would be interesting to consider at length the poet's views on Theism. Occasionally he speaks like a thorough-going Agnostic, sometimes like a Pantheist, and frequently when he refers to God he qualifies the word with a possessive pronoun—"my," "your," "his," or "their" God occurs fairly often. "If an ultimate phenomenon," he said to Eckermann, "has astonished us, we ought to rest content, nothing higher can be granted to us, and we ought not to seek anything behind it."

All attempts to prove that Goethe believed in immortality, in the Christian sense, are futile. Here is his opinion on this subject, as expressed when he was seventy-five years old:—

> This occupation with ideas of immortality is for people of rank, and especially for ladies who have nothing to do. But a man of real worth who has something to do here, and must toil and struggle to produce day by day, leaves the future world to itself, and is active and useful in this.

This does not reflect the mood of the moment, it represents Goethe's typical attitude to the question of man's survival of physical death.

On March 22, 1832, Germany's greatest son, the poet and thinker whom Strauss declared to be "a world in himself," died an almost ideal death. His suffering was slight and he had no consciousness of the approaching end. Eckermann saw his body prepared for burial, and noted the peace and firmness of the features—"a perfect man lay in great beauty before me." "More light!" This was the poet's last utterance. His meaning was of course purely physical, but it was symbolic of his life and his life's work.

Authorities: The reader may consult the *Freethinker* of January 31 and February 7, 1932.

GEORGE GROTE.

GEORGE GROTE, the author of our classic *History of Greece,* was born on November 17, 1794. He was a disciple of Bentham and a confirmed Atheist. His death, which occurred on June 18, 1871, was full of serenity. "Early in the month of June," writes Mrs. Grote, "a marked change supervened, and at the end of three weeks his honourable, virtuous, and laborious course was closed by a tranquil and painless death." [34]

The Rev. Peter Anton, in his *Masters of History,* obviously takes his account of Grote's death from this source, but it is worth noticing that he enhances, instead of weakening, the panegyric. "The great historian," he says, "passed away tranquilly and without pain; and thus was brought to a close a career singularly devoted, conscientious, and laborious, a life rich in virtue and honour and the

[34] *Personal Life of George Grote.* By Mrs. Grote, p. 330.

esteem of the wise and the good." Three centuries ago Grote might have been burnt to death; but the custodians of Westminster Abbey are now anxious to enrich their precincts with celebrities, and the Atheist historian is interred there with Freethinkers like Ephraim Chambers, Sir Charles Lyell, and Charles Darwin.

HELVETIUS.

HELVETIUS, the French philosopher, was born in 1715. His death took place on December 26, 1771. By accident or negligence, his famous treatise, *L'Esprit,* passed the censorship; but, on its true character being recognized, the censor was cashiered, and the author dismissed from an honorary post in the Queen's household. The indictment, says Mr. Morley, described the work as a " collection into one cover of everything that impiety could imagine, calculated to engender hatred against Christianity and Catholicism." [35] The book was publicly burnt, and the same fire consumed Voltaire's poem on Natural Religion. Here is a passage which may help to explain its fate :—

> It is fanaticism that puts arms into the hands of Christian princes; it orders Catholics to massacre heretics; it brings out upon the earth again those tortures that were invented by such monsters as Phalaris, as Busiris, as Nero; in Spain it piles and lights up the fires of the Inquisition, while the pious Spaniards leave their ports and sail across distant seas, to plant the Cross and spread desolation in America. Turn your eyes to north or south, to east or west; on every side you see the consecrated knife

[35] *Diderot,* Vol. II., 124.

of Religion raised against the breasts of women, of children, of old men, and the earth all smoking with the blood of victims immolated to false gods or the Supreme Being, and presenting one vast, sickening, horrible charnel-house of intolerance.

Marmontel described Helvetius as "liberal, generous, unostentatious, and benevolent." His death was mourned by a wide circle of friends and dependants. "Day by day," says Condorcet, "he felt his strength failing. An attack of gout, which flew to the head and chest, deprived him at first of consciousness, and soon of life." [36]

HENRY HETHERINGTON.

HENRY HETHERINGTON, one of the heroes of "the free press," was born at Compton Street, Soho, London, in 1792. He very early became an ardent reformer. In 1830 the Government obtained three convictions against him for publishing the *Poor Man's Guardian,* and he was lodged for six months in Clerkenwell gaol. At the end of 1832 he was again imprisoned there for six months, his treatment being most cruel. An opening, called a window, but without a pane of glass, let in the rain and snow by day and night. In 1841 he was a third time incarcerated in the Queen's Bench prison for four months. This time his crime was "blasphemy," in other words, publishing Haslam's *Letters to the Clergy.* He died on August 24, 1849, in his fifty-seventh year, leaving behind him his *Last Will and Testament,* from which we take the following extracts:—

[36] Essay by Condorcet, prefixed to the *Œuvres* of Helvetius (1784).

As life is uncertain, it behoves every one to make preparations for death; I deem it therefore a duty incumbent on me, ere I quit this life, to express in writing, for the satisfaction and guidance of esteemed friends, my feelings and opinions in reference to our common principles. I adopt this course that no mistake or misapprehension may arise through the false reports of those who officiously and obtrusively obtain access to the death-beds of avowed infidels to priestcraft and superstition; and who, by their annoying importunities, labour to extort from an opponent, whose intellect is already worn out and subdued by protracted physical suffering, some trifling admission, that they may blazon it forth to the world as a Death-bed Confession, and a triumph of Christianity over infidelity.

In the first place, then, I calmly and deliberately declare that I do not believe in the popular notion of the existence of an Almighty, All-Wise and Benevolent God—possessing intelligence, and conscious of his own operations; because these attributes involve such a mass of absurdities and contradictions, so much cruelty and injustice on his part to the poor and destitute portion of his creatures—that, in my opinion, no rational reflecting mind can, after disinterested investigation, give credence to the existence of such a Being. 2nd. I believe death to be an eternal sleep—that I shall never live again in this world, or another, with a consciousness that I am the same identical person that once lived, performed the duties, and exercised the functions of a human being. 3rd. I consider priestcraft and superstition the greatest obstacle to human improvement and happiness. During my life I have, to the best of my ability, sincerely and strenuously exposed and opposed them, and die with a firm conviction that Truth, Justice, and Liberty will never be permanently established on earth till every vestige of priestcraft and superstition shall be utterly des-

troyed. 4th. I have ever considered that the only religion useful to man consists exclusively of the practice of morality, and in the mutual interchange of kind actions. In such a religion there is no room for priests—and when I see them interfering at our births, marriages and deaths, pretending to conduct us safely through this state of being to another and happier world, any disinterested person of the least shrewdness and discernment must perceive that their sole aim is to stultify the minds of the people by their incomprehensible doctrines, that they may the more effectually fleece the poor deluded sheep who listen to their empty babblings and mystifications. 5th. As I have lived so I die, a determined opponent to their nefarious and plundering system. I wish my friends, therefore, to deposit my remains in unconsecrated ground, and trust they will allow no priest, or clergyman of any denomination, to interfere in any way whatever at my funeral. My earnest desire is, that no relation or friend shall wear black or any kind of mourning, as I consider it contrary to our rational principles to indicate respect for a departed friend by complying with a hypocritical custom. 6th. I wish those who respect me, and who have laboured in our common cause, to attend my remains to their last resting place, not so much in consideration of the individual, as to do honour to our just, benevolent and rational principles. I hope all true Rationalists will leave pompous displays to the tools of priestcraft and superstition.

Hetherington wrote this Testament nearly two years before his death, but he signed it with a firm hand three days before he breathed his last, in the presence of Thomas Cooper, who left it at the *Reasoner* office for " the inspection of the curious or sceptical." Thomas Cooper became a Christian, but he could not repudiate what he printed at the time, or

destroy his " personal testimony," as he called it, to the consistency with which Hetherington died in the principles of Freethought.

THOMAS HOBBES.

THE Philosopher of Malmesbury, as he is often called, was one of the clearest and boldest thinkers that ever lived. His theological proclivities are well expressed in his witty aphorism that superstition is religion out of fashion, and religion superstition in fashion. Although a courageous thinker, Hobbes was physically timid. This fact is explained by the circumstances of his birth. In the spring of 1588 all England was alarmed at the news that the mighty Spanish Armada had set sail for the purpose of deposing Queen Elizabeth, bringing the country under a foreign yoke, and re-establishing the power of the papacy. In sheer fright, the wife of the vicar of Westport, now part of Malmesbury, gave premature birth to her second son on Good Friday, the 5th of April. This seven months' child used to say, in later life, that his mother brought forth himself and a twin brother Fear. He was delicate and nervous all his days. Yet through strict temperance he reached the great age of ninety-one, dying on the 4th of December, 1679.

This parson's son was destined to be hated by the clergy for his heresy. The Great Fire of 1666, following the Great Plague of the previous year, excited popular superstition, and to appease the wrath of God, a new Bill was introduced in Parliament against Atheism and profaneness. The Committee to which the Bill was entrusted were empowered to " receive information touching " heretical books, and Hobbes's *Leviathan* was mentioned " in particular."

The old philosopher, then verging on eighty, was naturally alarmed. Bold as he was in thought, his inherited physical timidity shrank from the prospect of the prison, the scaffold, or the stake. He made a show of conformity, and according to Bishop Kennet, who is not an irreproachable witness, he partook of the sacrament. It was said by some, however, that he acted thus in compliance with the wishes of the Devonshire family, who were his protectors, and whose private chapel he attended. A noticeable fact was that he always went out before the sermon, and when asked his reason, he answered that "they could teach him nothing but what he knew." He spoke of the chaplain, Dr. Jasper Mayne, as "a very silly fellow."

Hated by the clergy, and especially by the bishops; owing his liberty and perhaps his life to powerful patrons; fearing that some fanatic might take the parsons' hints and play the part of an assassin; Hobbes is said to have kept a lighted candle in his bedroom. The fact, if it be such, is not mentioned in Professor Croom Robertson's exhaustive biography.[37] It is perhaps a bit of pious gossip. But were the story authentic, it would not show that Hobbes had any supernatural fears. He was more apprehensive of assassins than of ghosts and devils. Being very old, too, and his life precarious, he might well desire a light in his bedroom in case of accident or sudden sickness.

Hobbes does not appear to have troubled himself about death. Bishop Kennet relates that only "the winter before he died he made a warm greatcoat, which he said must last him three years, and then he would have such another." Even so late as August,

[37] *Hobbes.* By George Croom Robertson (1886).

1676, four months before his decease, he was "writing somewhat" for his publisher to "print in English." About the middle of October he had an attack of stranguary, and "Wood and Kennet both have it that, on hearing the trouble was past cure, he exclaimed, 'I shall be glad then to find a hole to creep out of the world at.'" [38] This story was picked up thirty years after Hobbes's death, and is probably apocryphal. If the philosopher said anything of the kind, he doubtless meant that, being very old, and without wife, child, or relative to care for him, he would be glad to find a shelter for his last moments, and to expire in comfort and peace. At the end of November his right side was paralysed, and he lost his speech. He "lingered in a somnolent state" for several days, says Professor Robertson, and "then his life quietly went out."

Bishop Kennet was absurd enough to hint that Hobbes's "lying some days in a silent stupefaction, did seem owing to his mind, more than his body." [39] An old man of ninety-one suffers a paralytic stroke, loses his speech, sinks into unconsciousness, and quietly expires. What could be more natural? Yet the Bishop, belonging to an order which always scents a brimstone flavour round the heretic's death-bed, must explain this stupor and inanition by supposing that the moribund philosopher was in a fit of despair. We have only to add that Bishop Kennet was not present at Hobbes's death. His theory is, therefore, only a professional surmise; and we may be sure that the wish was father to the thought.

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[38] Robertson, p. 203.

[39] *Memoirs of the Cavendish Family*, p. 108.

AUSTIN HOLYOAKE.

THIS steadfast Freethinker was a younger brother of George Jacob Holyoake. He was of a singularly modest and amiable nature, and although he left many friends he left not a single enemy. He was entirely devoted to the Freethought cause, and satisfied to work hard behind the scenes while more popular figures took the credit and profit. His assiduity in the publishing business at Fleet Street, which was ostensibly managed by his better-known and more fortunate brother, induced a witty friend to call him "Jacob's ladder." Afterwards he threw in his lot with Charles Bradlaugh, then the redoubtable "Iconoclast," and became the printer and in part sub-editor of the *National Reformer,* to whose columns he was a frequent and welcome contributor. He died on April 10, 1874, and was interred at Highgate Cemetery, his funeral being largely attended by the London Freethinkers, including C. Bradlaugh, C. Watts, G. W. Foote, James Thomson and G. J. Holyoake. The malady that carried him off was consumption; he was conscious almost to the last; and his only regret in dying, at the comparatively early age of forty-seven, was that he could no longer fight the battle of freedom, nor protect the youth of his little son and daughter.

Two days before his death, Austin Holyoake dictated his last thoughts on religion, which were written down by his devoted wife, and printed in the *National Reformer* of April 19, 1874. Part of this document is filled with his mental history. In the remainder he reiterates his disbelief in the cardinal doctrines of Christianity. The following extracts are interesting and pertinent:—

Christians constantly tell Freethinkers that their principles of "negation," as they term them, may do very well for health; but when the hour of sickness and approaching death arrives they utterly break down, and the hope of a "blessed immortality" can alone give consolation. In my own case I have been anxious to test the truth of this assertion, and have therefore deferred till the latest moment I think it prudent to dictate these few lines.

To desire eternal bliss is no proof that we shall ever attain it; and it has long seemed to me absurd to believe in that which we wish for, however ardently. I regard all forms of Christianity as founded in selfishness. It is the expectation held out of bliss through all eternity, in return for the profession of faith in Christ and him crucified, that induces the erection of temples of worship in all Christian lands. Remove the extravagant promise, and you will hear very little of the Christian religion.

As I have stated before, my mind being free from any doubts on these bewildering matters of speculation, I have experienced for twenty years the most perfect mental repose; and now I find that the near approach of death, the "grim King of Terrors," gives me not the slightest alarm. I have suffered, and am suffering, most intensely both by night and day; but this has not produced the least symptom of change of opinion. No amount of bodily torture can alter a mental conviction. Those who, under pain, say they see the error of their previous belief, had never thought out the subject for themselves.

These are words of transparent sincerity; not a phrase is strained, not a line aims at effect. Reading them, we feel in the presence of an earnest man bravely confronting death, consciously sustained by his convictions, and serenely bidding the world farewell.

Austin Holyoake's Secular Burial Service is still in general use among Freethinkers.

GEORGE JACOB HOLYOAKE.

Holyoake was born in Birmingham in 1817. In *The Last Trial for Atheism,* he says: "In early youth I was religious," and "as I grew up I attended missionary meetings, and my few pence were given to that cause." In 1836 he became a Sunday School teacher, but in June of the following year he met Robert Owen and this led to serious inquiry into the grounds of his religious beliefs and to their complete abandonment before his twenty-fourth year. In 1841 Holyoake, Southwell, Ryall and Chilton founded the *Oracle of Reason,* an atheistic publication. On November 27 an article appeared under the title, "The Jew Book," which resulted in the prosecution and imprisonment of Southwell for blasphemy. Holyoake himself was destined soon to undergo a similar experience. In a speech at Cheltenham in 1842 he said that in view of the prevailing poverty he would put the Church "on half pay"—a crime for which Mr. Justice Erskine sentenced him to six months' imprisonment. In June, 1846, appeared the first issue of his weekly paper, *The Reasoner,* which continued until June, 1861. New series with the same title appeared subsequently, the last in 1871. Holyoake was the first to use the term "Secularism"—in 1850—and shortly after this date he defined it as expressing a philosophy of life:—

> Secularism relates to the present existence of man, having for its object the development of the physical, intellectual and moral nature of man, to the highest point, as the immediate duty of society, inculcating the practical sufficiency of natural morality apart from Atheism, Theism or Christianity.

Holyoake wrote numerous pamphlets on various aspects of Secularism; but his more important works deal with the co-operative movement in England.

He died peacefully, in the presence of his wife and daughter, at Brighton in January, 1906. *Bygones Worth Remembering* was published in his eighty-ninth year, and during the last few weeks of his life he took a keen interest in the general election then pending.

Authorities: C. W. F. Goss , *A Descriptive Bibliography of the Writings of G. J. Holyoake;* Joseph McCabe, *Life and Letters of G. J. Holyoake,* 1908.

VICTOR HUGO.

The greatest French poet of this century, perhaps the greatest French poet of all time, was a fervent Theist, reverencing the prophet of Nazareth as a man, and holding that the " divine tear " of Jesus and " the human smile " of Voltaire " compose the sweetness of the present civilization." But he was perfectly free from the trammels of creeds, and he hated priestcraft, like despotism, with a perfect hatred.

In one of his striking later poems, " Religion et les Religions," he derides and denounces the tenets and pretensions of Christianity. The Devil, he says to the clergy, is only the monkey of superstition; your Hell is an outrage on Humanity and a blasphemy against God; and when you tell me that your deity made you in his own image, I reply that he must be very ugly.

As a man, as well as a writer, there was something magnificently grandiose about him. Substract him from the nineteenth century, and you rob it of much

of its glory. For nineteen years on a lonely channel island, an exile from the land of his birth and his love, he nursed the conscience of humanity within his mighty heart, brandishing the lightnings and thunders of chastisement over the heads of the political brigands who were stifling a nation, and prophesying their certain doom. When it came, after Sedan, he returned to Paris, and for fifteen years he was idolized by its people. There was great mourning at his death, and "all Paris" attended his funeral. But true to the simplicity of his life he ordered that his body should lie in a common coffin, which contrasted vividly with the splendid procession. France buried him, as she did Gambetta; he was laid to rest in the Church of St. Geneviève, re-secularised as the Pantheon for the occasion; and the interment took place without any religious rites.

Hugo's great oration on Voltaire, in 1878, roused the ire of the Bishop of Orleans, who reprimanded him in a public letter. The Freethinking poet sent a crushing reply:—

> France had to pass an ordeal. France was free. A man traitorously seized her in the night, threw her down and garrotted her. If a people could be killed, that man had slain France. He made her dead enough for him to reign over her. He began his reign, since it was a reign, with perjury, lying in wait, and massacre. He continued it by oppression, by tyranny, by despotism, by an unspeakable parody of religion and justice. He was monstrous and little. The *Te Deum, Magnificat, Salvum fac, Gloria tibi,* were sung for him. Who sang them? Ask yourself. The law delivered the people up to him. The Church delivered God up to him. Under that man sank down right, honour, country; he had beneath his feet oath, equity, probity, the glory of the flag, the dig-

nity of men, the liberty of citizens. That man's prosperity disconcerted the human conscience. It lasted nineteen years. During that time you were in a palace. I was in exile. I pity you, sir.

Despite this terrible rebuff to Bishop Dupanloup, another priest, Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, had the temerity and bad taste to obtrude himself when Victor Hugo lay dying in 1885. Being born on February 26, 1802, the poet was in his eighty-fourth year, and expiring naturally of old age. Had the rites of the Church been performed on him in such circumstances, it would have been an insufferable farce. Yet the Archbishop wrote to Madame Lockroy, offering to bring personally "the succour and consolation so much needed in these cruel ordeals." Monsieur Lockroy at once replied as follows:—

> Madame Lockroy, who cannot leave the bedside of her father-in-law, begs me to thank you for the sentiments which you have expressed with so much eloquence and kindness. As regards M. Victor Hugo, he has again said within the last few days, that he had no wish during his illness to be attended by a priest of any persuasion. We should be wanting in our duty if we did not respect his resolution.[40]

Hugo's death-chamber was thus unprofaned by the presence of a priest. He expired in peace, surrounded by the beings he loved. According to the *Times* correspondent in Paris, "Almost his last words, addressed to his grand-daughter, were, 'Adieu, Jeanne, adieu!' And his last movement of consciousness was to clasp his grandson's hand."

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[40] London *Times*, May 23, 1885: Paris Correspondent's letter.

DAVID HUME.

PROFESSOR HUXLEY ventures to call David Hume "the most acute thinker of the eighteenth century, even though it produced Kant." [41] Hume's greatness is no less clearly acknowledged by Joseph De Maistre, the foremost champion of the Papacy in our own country. "I believe," he says, "that taking all into account, the eighteenth century, so fertile in this respect, has not produced a single enemy of religion who can be compared with him. His cold venom is far more dangerous than the foaming rage of Voltaire. If ever, among men who have heard the gospel preached, there has existed a veritable Atheist (which I will not undertake to decide) it is he." [42] Allowing for the personal animosity in his estimate of Hume, De Maistre is as accurate as Huxley. The immortal *Essays* attest both his penetration and his scepticism; the one on Miracles being a perpetual stumbling-block to Christian apologists. With superb irony, Hume closes that portentous discourse with a reprimand of "those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason." He reminds them that "our most holy religion is founded on *faith*, not on *reason*." He remarks that Christianity was "not only attended by miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one." For "whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of his understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

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[41] *Lay Sermons*, p. 141.

[42] *Lettres sur l'Inquisition*, pp. 147, 148.

Hume was born at Edinburgh on April 26, 1711. His life was the uneventful one of a literary man. Besides his *Essays*, he published a *History of England*, which was the first serious effort in that direction. Judged by the standard of our day it is inadequate; but it abounds in philosophical reflections of the highest order, and its style is nearly perfect. Gibbon, who was a good judge of style, had an unbounded admiration for Hume's "careless inimitable beauties."

Fortune, however, was not so kind to him as fame. At the age of forty, his frugal habits had enabled him to save no more than £1,000. He reckoned his income at £50 a year, but his wants were few, his spirit was cheerful, and there were few prizes in the lottery of life for which he would have made an exchange. In 1775 his health began to fail. Knowing that his disorder (hemorrhage of the bowels) would prove fatal, he made his will, and wrote *My Own Life*, the conclusion of which, says Huxley, "is one of the most cheerful, simple and dignified leave-takings of life and all its concerns, extant." He died on August 25, 1776, and was buried a few days later on the eastern slope of Calton Hill, Edinburgh, his body being "attended by a great concourse of people, who seem to have anticipated for it the fate appropriate to wizards and necromancers." [43]

Adam Smith, the great author of the *Wealth of Nations*, was one of Hume's most intimate friends. He tells us that Hume went to London in April, 1776, and soon after his return he "gave up all hope of recovery, but submitted with the utmost cheerfulness, and the most perfect complacency and resignation." His cheerfulness was so great that many people could not believe he was dying. "Mr. Hume's magnani-

[43] *Hume*, by Professor Huxley, p. 43.

mity and firmness were such," said Adam Smith, "that his most affectionate friends knew that they hazarded nothing in talking and writing to him as a dying man, and that, so far from being hurt by this frankness, he was rather pleased and flattered by it." His chief thought in relation to the possible prolongation of his life, which his friends hoped although he told them their hopes were groundless, was that he would have "the satisfaction of seeing the downfall of some of the prevailing systems of superstition." On August 8, Adam Smith went to Kircaldy, leaving Hume in a very weak state but still very cheerful. On August 28, he received the following letter from Dr. Black, the physician, announcing the philosopher's death:—

Edinburgh,
Monday, August 26, 1776.

Dear Sir,—Yesterday about four o'clock, afternoon, Mr. Hume expired. The near approach of his death became evident in the night between Thursday and Friday, when his disease became excessive, and soon weakened him so much, that he could no longer rise out of his bed. He continued to the last perfectly sensible and free from much pain and feelings of distress. He never dropped the smallest expression of impatience; but when he had occasion to speak to the people about him, always did it with affection and tenderness. I thought it improper to write to bring you over, especially as I heard that he had dictated a letter to you, desiring you not to come. When he became weak it cost him an effort to speak, and he died in such a happy composure of mind that nothing could exceed it.

"Thus," says Adam Smith, "died our most excellent and never to be forgotten friend . . . Upon the whole, I have always considered him, both in his lifetime and since his death as approaching as nearly to

the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit." [44]

ROBERT GREEN INGERSOLL.

INGERSOLL was born in the small town of Dresden, State of New York, on August 11, 1833. His father was a Minister of the Congregational Church, and the boy was brought up in an evangelical atmosphere, though he never accepted some of the dogmas which he was taught. At an early age he expressed his abhorrence of the idea of an eternal hell. In 1854 he was admitted to the Bar and soon gained a large practice.

The Civil War broke out in 1861, and he raised for the anti-slavery cause a regiment of Illinois cavalry, of which he was appointed colonel. During the war he was taken prisoner by the Confederate troops. In 1866 he was appointed Attorney-General of Illinois, and would most certainly have been Governor of the State but for the religious prejudice against him.

Ingersoll's eloquence, wit, and keen logic in controversy made him a great asset to the popular Freethought Movement, and to an almost equal degree it caused him to be bitterly attacked and slandered by the clergy, especially by the ultra-evangelical Talmage. What above all else excited orthodox opposition was Ingersoll's habit of laughing at the absurdities of Christianity. This play of wit and satire is noticeable in *The Mistakes of Moses,* probably the best known of his Freethought writings. Among his pamphlets and reported speeches, which have had a wide circulation throughout the English-speaking

[44] *Letter to William Strahan,* dated November 9, 1776, and usually prefixed to Hume's *History of England.*

world, but are far too numerous for detailed reference here, may be mentioned *Ghosts, What must I do to be saved?* and *Real Blasphemy*. Perhaps he is seen at his literary best in the *Reply to Gladstone,* which appeared originally in the *North American Review* for June, 1888. The replies to his assaults on the faith would alone form a small library.

His attitude to the whole question of a future life is perfectly Agnostic. In *Faith and Fact,* 1887 (p. 12) he declares: "I know no more (of the immortality of the soul) than the lowest savage, no more than a doctor of divinity—that is to say, nothing." In *God and Man,* 1888 (p. 11) he is emphatic concerning the worthlessness of what is called the Christian hope: "It offers no consolation to any good and loving man." He pours all that refined scorn of which he was a master on the promise of a future life to the oppressed as compensation for their sufferings here (*Repairing the Idols,* 1888, pp. 6-8). At the grave of the child, Harry Miller, speaking of the question, "Whither?" he said: "The poor barbarian weeping over his dead can answer the question as intelligently and satisfactorily as the robed priests of the most authentic creed." (Appendix to *Mistakes of Moses.*)

Ingersoll died of *angina pectoris* on July 21, 1899. He passed away very peacefully and his last words were, "I am better now." But it was not to be expected that so great an "infidel" would be spared the familiar story of a death-bed recantation, despite the fact that all the details of his last moments are well known. His friend, W. J. Armstrong, summed them up concisely in the Los Angeles *Times Magazine*: "He died unexpectedly and suddenly, after conversing cheerfully a few minutes before with the members of his family." (The *Freethinker,* October 4, 1908).

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

RICHARD JEFFERIES, the nature-lover, who wrote of hedge-rows and woodlands and wild life, was born in 1848. Religion never had a strong hold upon him. In *The Story of My Heart,* published in 1883, four years before he died, he says:—

> In the march of time there fell away from my mind, as the leaves from the trees in autumn, the last traces and relics of superstitions and traditions acquired compulsorily in childhood. Always feebly adhering, they finally disappeared.

He died on August 14, 1887, after several years of painful suffering. Sir Walter Besant, in his *Eulogy of Richard Jefferies,* makes it appear that Jefferies, at the end, returned to the Christian faith. Sir Walter related the story as he had heard it; but he himself a few years later wrote to Mr. H. S. Salt:—

> I stated in my Eulogy that he died a Christian. This was true in the sense of outward conformity. His wife read to him the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But, I have since been informed, he was weak, too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote *The Story of My Heart.* You are, I am convinced, quite right. When a man gets as far as Jefferies did—when he has shed and scattered to the winds all sacerdotalism and authority—he does not go back. (H. S. Salt: *Company I have Kept,* 1930, pp. 106-7.)

JULIAN THE APOSTATE.

THE life of Julian, Roman Emperor from 361 to 363 A.D., is of considerable interest to Freethinkers. At an early age his education was entrusted to Christian monks; but he soon began to contrast the Greek view of life and its intellectual activities with the gloomy

piety and the theological hair-splitting of his teachers. His *Refutation of the Christian Religion* was destroyed by the efforts of Theodosius II., but we know that it contained some acute criticism of the absurd stories in the Old Testament and also of the contradictory statements in the Gospel narratives of the life of Christ. "No wild beasts," he once declared, "are so hostile to men as Christian sects in general are to one another."

Fortunately, we happen to know the details of Julian's last days. He died in the campaign against the Persians, in which he showed supreme valour and the utmost calm. The story of his exclaiming, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!" is pure fiction. "Christian legend soon began to busy itself in weaving strange tales round the Emperor's death-bed, for which we have no foundation in any trustworthy authorities. They need no disproof" (Alice Gardner, *Julian, Philosopher and Emperor*). These "strange tales" belong to the early samples of the wares, now familiar enough, which Christians have manufactured "for the greater glory of God."

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING.

LESSING was born in 1729 at Kamenz, Saxony, where his father was a pastor in the Lutheran Church. At the University, Leipzig, he studied theology, medicine and philosophy, but soon devoted himself mainly to literary criticism. At an early age he showed his independent nature, and this independence was especially noticeable in his views on religion. In his essay, *How the Ancients Represented Death,* he contrasts the attitude of classical antiquity to death as the

natural end of life with that of the Christian faith, which considers death a penalty for sin. Some of the posthumous essays of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, *The Principal Truths of Natural Religion* and the *Doctrines of Reason,* in which he subjects the important claims of Christianity to a profound examination and rejects them as untenable, were edited by Lessing, who took them with him to Wolfenbuettel. Lessing himself was greatly impressed by Reimarus' work, though he dissented from many of its conclusions. His part in circulating these heterodox views and his own ideas of the need of free discussion in religion, as expressed in *The Education of the Human Race,* were distasteful to the orthodox of the time, and Pastor Goeze pursued him as viciously as Talmage pursued Ingersoll a century later.

In a conversation with Jacoby in 1780 Lessing expressed high appreciation of Goethe's *Prometheus.* He added : " If I am a follower of anyone, it can only be Spinoza. There is no other philosophy but Spinoza's."

Towards the end of his life Lessing suffered severely from asthma, and in February 1781, the malady became acute. He felt that the hand of death was upon him, but conversed with his friends " with much of his old liveliness." To one of them who spoke of the annoyance which the clerics caused Voltaire on his death-bed, Lessing exclaimed : " When you see me about to die, call the notary; I will declare before him that I die in none of the prevailing religions." On February 15 he rallied " and joked with some of those who came to visit him "; but in the evening of the same day " a stroke of apoplexy followed, and after life's fitful fever he slept well" (James Sime, *Lessing,* ii. 345-6).

M. LITTRE.

THIS great French Positivist died in 1882 at the ripe age of eighty-one. M. Littré was one of the foremost writers in France. His monumental *Dictionary of the French Language* is the greatest work of its kind in the world. As a scholar and a philosopher his eminence was universally recognized.

M. Littré's wife was an ardent Catholic, yet she was allowed to follow her own religious inclinations without the least interference. She, however, was less scrupulous than her husband. After enjoying for so many years the benefit of his steadfast toleration, she took advantage of her position to exclude his friends from his death-bed, to have him baptized in his last moments, and to secure his burial in consecrated ground with pious rites. Not satisfied with this, she even allowed it to be understood that her husband had recanted his heresy and died in the bosom of the Church. The Abbé Huvelin, her confessor, who frequently visited M. Littré during his last illness, assisted her in the fraud.

There was naturally a disturbance at M. Littré's funeral. As the *Standard* correspondent wrote, his friends and disciples were " very angry at this recantation *in extremis,* and claimed that dishonest priestcraft took advantage of the darkness cast over that clear intellect by the mist of approaching death to perform the rites of the Church over his semi-inanimate body."

At the grave M. Wyrouboff, editor of the Comtist review, *La Philosophie Positive,* founded by M. Littré, delivered a brief address to the Freethinkers who remained, which concluded thus:—

Littré proved by his example that it is possible for a man to possess a noble and generous heart, and at the same time espouse a doctrine which admits nothing beyond what is positively real and which prevents any recantation. And, gentlemen, in spite of deceptive appearances, Littré died as he had lived, without contradictions or weakness. All those who knew that calm and serene mind—and I was of the number of those who did—are well aware that it was irrevocably closed to the "unknowable," and that it was thoroughly prepared to meet courageously the irresistible laws of nature. And now sleep in peace, proud and noble thinker! You will not have the eternity of a world to come, which you never expected; but you leave behind you your country that you strove honestly to serve, the Republic which you always loved, a generation of disciples who will remain faithful to you; and last, but not least, you leave your thoughts and your virtues to the whole world. Social immortality, the only beneficent and fecund immortality, commences for you to-day.

M. Wyrouboff has since amply proved his statements.

The English press creditably rejected the story of M. Littré's recantation. The *Daily News* sneered at it, the *Times* described it as absurd, the *Standard* said it looked untrue. But the *Morning Advertiser* was still more outspoken. It said:—

There can hardly be a doubt that M. Littré died a steadfast adherent to the principles he so powerfully advocated during his laborious and distinguished life. The Church may claim, as our Paris correspondent, in his interesting note on the subject, tells us she is already claiming, the death-bed conversion of the great unbeliever, who for the last thirty-five years was one of her most active and formidable enemies. She has attempted to take the same posthumous revenge on Voltaire, on Paine, and on many

> others, who were described by Roman Catholic writers as calling in the last dreadful hour for the spiritual support they held up to ridicule in the confidence of health and the presumption of their intellect.

Unfortunately for the clericals, there exists a document which may be considered M. Littré's last confession. It is an article written for the Comtist review a year before his death, entitled, "Pour la Dernière Fois"—For the Last Time. While writing it he knew that his end was not far off. "For many months," he says, "my sufferings have prostrated me with dreadful persistence . . . Every evening when I have to be put to bed, my pains are exasperated, and often I have not the strength to stifle cries which are grievous to me and grievous to those who tend me." After the article was completed his malady increased. Fearing the worst, he wrote to his friend, M. Caubet, as follows:—

> Last Saturday I swooned away for a long time. It is for that reason I send you, a little prematurely, my article for the Review. *If I live,* I will correct the proofs as usual. *If I die,* let it be printed and published in the Review as a posthumous article. It will be a last trouble which I venture to give you. The reader must do his best to follow the manuscript faithfully.

Let us see what M. Littré's last confession is. I translate two passages from the article. Referring to Charles Greville, he says:—

> I feel nothing of what he experienced. Like him, I find it impossible to accept the theory of the world, which Catholicism prescribes to all true believers; but I do not regret being without such doctrines, and I cannot discover in myself any wish to return to them.

And he concludes the article with these words :—

> Positive Philosophy, which has so supported me since my thirtieth year, and which, in giving me an ideal, a craving for progress, the vision of history and care for humanity, has preserved me from being a simple negationist, accompanies me faithfully in these last trials. The questions it solves in its own way, the rules it prescribes by virtue of its principle, the beliefs it discountenances in the name of our ignorance of everything absolute; of these I have in the preceding pages made an examination, which I conclude with the supreme word of the commencement—*for the last time.*

So much for the lying story of M. Littré's recantation.

JOHN T. LLOYD.

JOHN T. LLOYD was born at Felin-y-wig, Denbighshire, in 1850. He was brought up in the Calvinistic faith, the form of Christianity handed down to him "as a sacred legacy through a long line of ancestors," and even as a boy he was "resolutely ambitious to enter the ministry of the gospel." This ambition met with an early realization. Lloyd was enrolled as a candidate for the ministry, entered the University, and afterwards studied theology for three years at Bala College. He occupied the pulpit of the Presbyterian Church in South Africa for twenty years, and throughout that period was regarded as "a popular preacher." During the greater part of this time the churches in which he officiated were too small to accommodate the crowds that flocked to hear him.

In a series of articles contributed to the *Freethinker* in 1903, and republished under the title, *From Christian Pulpit to Secular Platform,* Lloyd has left a detailed account of the many phases of religious thought through which he passed before he finally

" discarded God, Christ, and Immortality, with all the absurd dogmas concerning them." These sixty pages are much more than a criticism of his early creed, they are a " human document " which often reminds us of the mental experience, as recorded by themselves, of Jospeh Symes and Moncure D. Conway, who also left the Christian pulpit for the Secular platform.

From 1903, when he decided to devote the remainder of his life to the Freethought cause, until his death Lloyd was a regular contributor to the *Freethinker,* and during nearly the whole of this period he was also a prominent lecturer for the National Secular Society. He died on February 1, 1928, and showed a keen interest in the progress of Freethought until within a few weeks of his death. An attack of cerebral hæmorrhage at the beginning of December, 1927, prevented further active work for the cause, and before the end came he lost consciousness.

Lloyd's pamphlet, *God-eating: A Study in Christianity and Cannibalism* (1921), is a popularly written but scholarly exposition of the principal sacrament of the Christian Church, its origin, and the superstitious history associated with it. His vigorous protest against the imprisonment of J. W. Gott for blasphemy in 1922, and his remark at the time—" these prosecutions are a sign of weakness, not of strength "—will long be remembered by English Secularists.

EMMA MARTIN.

Emma Martin was born in Bristol in 1812. She was brought up in the Baptist denomination, but the trial of Southwell for blasphemy led her to inquire into the grounds of her faith and to reject it completely. She

became an enthusiastic speaker and writer for the Freethought cause, and was imprisoned for blasphemy. In 1844 she wrote *Baptism a Pagan Rite,* and this was followed by *The Bible no Revelation* and *Reasons for Renouncing Christianity.* In 1848 a leaflet was circulated in Scotland, giving a circumstantial account of her death-bed recantation. At the time she was actually lecturing in London and continued to do so for about three years.

She died at Finchley Common on October 8, 1851, after severe suffering which she endured with great fortitude. Eight days before her death G. J. Holyoake visited her and found her reading Strauss's *Life of Jesus.* She made several requests to him, one being that he should speak at her graveside. His address was published as a pamphlet under the title, *The Last Days of Mrs. Emma Martin.* The Rev. Brewin Grant, however, true to the best traditions of his evangelical Christianity, described her death as a " dreadful tragedy " and agony as " the eloquent and fitting requiem " for it.

HARRIET MARTINEAU.

THIS gifted woman died on May 27, 1876, after a long and useful life, filled with literary labour in the cause of progress. On April 19, less than six weeks before her death, she wrote her last letter to Mr. H. G. Atkinson, from which the following is taken :—

> I cannot think of any future as at all probable, except the "annihilation" from which some people recoil with so much horror. I find myself here in

the universe—I know not how, whence or why. I see everything in the universe go out and disappear, and I see no reason for supposing that it is not an actual and entire death. And for my part, I have no objection to such an extinction. I well remember the passion with which W. E. Forster said to me "I had rather be damned than annihilated." If he once felt five minutes' damnation, he would be thankful for extinction in preference. The truth is, I care little about it any way. Now that the event draws near, and that I see how fully my household expect my death pretty soon, the universe opens so widely before my view, and I see the old notions of death, and scenes to follow so merely human—so impossible to be true, when one glanced through the range of science—that I see nothing to be done but to wait, without fear or hope for future experience, nor have I any fear of it. Under the weariness of illness I long to be asleep.[45]

These are the words of a brave woman, who met Death with the same fortitude as she exhibited in the presence of the defenders of slavery in the United States.

GEORGE MEREDITH.

MEREDITH was born in Hampshire in 1828 and died in 1909. He ranks as one of the greatest of English novelists, and very high as a poet. Even "in his late boyhood" he "detested conventional religion," but not Christianity as he interpreted it for himself. (R. E. Sencourt, *The Life of George Meredith,* 1929,

[45] *Autobiography of Harriet Martineau,* Vol III., p. 454; Edition 1877.

p. 6.) Nearly every chapter in this biography shows Meredith's rejection of the fundamentals of Christianity—the friendships which he cultivated, his references to Darwin, Swinburne and Renan, and his constant emphasis on " the creative activity of nature " as the sole source of life and energy. And Meredith was in full sympathy with the popular Freethought Movement. He was one of the earliest members of the General Council of the Secular Education League (*Nineteenth Century*, April, 1911, p. 743). He corresponded with G. W. Foote, valued his friendship, and " gave his name as well as his cheque " to the support of the *Freethinker*. He protested against the imprisonment of Foote for blasphemy in 1883, and in one of his letters to him spoke of the fight against the priests as " the best of causes."

Meredith died on May 18, 1909. On April 13 he wrote a letter to Theodore Watts-Dunton on the death of Swinburne, which took place three days previously. " He was the greatest of our lyric poets—of the world, I could say, considering what a language he had to wield." On April 23 he wrote to Foote, enclosing a contribution to the *Freethinker* fund, and this was almost certainly the last letter he ever wrote. On May 4, he said: " Nature is my God and I trust in her." His remains were cremated at Woking, and there was no religious service; but when the ashes were buried at Dorking cemetery " a clergyman muttered some Anglican prayers," and the same day, in Westminster Abbey, " the Dean conducted with great ceremony a requiem service."

Meredith's sympathy with Freethought and Freethinkers is noticeable in his correspondence, and his poetry vibrates throughout with love of life and Nature, with the spirit summed up in the lines:—

Into the Earth that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?

Authorities: Sencourt; Photiadès, *George Meredith; Freethinker,* October 20, 1912; "George Meredith: Freethinker," in *Shakespeare and other Literary Essays,* by G. W. Foote.

JEAN MESLIER.

Jean Meslier, or more correctly, Mellier, was born on June 15, 1664. His death occurred in 1733. He was curé, or parish priest, of Entrépigny. He left his small property to his parishioners, and asked to be buried in his own garden. Among his effects were found three copies of a manuscript of 370 folios, signed by his own hand and entitled *My Testament.* The writing was found to be a merciless exposure of Christianity. What he could not say while alive, he said in this legacy to his flock. As he himself wrote on the wrapper of the copy for his parishioners, "I have not dared to say it during my life, but I will say it at least in dying or after my death." On November 17, 1794, the National Convention sent to the Committee of Public Instruction a proposal to erect a statue to Meslier as "the first priest who had the courage and honesty to abjure his religious errors." A work called *Bon Sens,* translated into English as *Good Sense,* is not by Meslier, but by D'Holbach.

Authorities: Larousse, *Dictionaire Universelle.* Bouilliot, *Biographie Ardenaise.* Voltaire's *Works and Letters.*

JAMES MILL.

JAMES MILL, the author of the *History of British India,* the *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind,* and other works, was a robust thinker and a powerful writer himself; though his name became more illustrious when borne by his great son, John Stuart Mill. James Mill was born in 1773. He would have entered the pulpit as a Presbyterian preacher, had he not " by his own studies and reflections been led to reject not only the belief in Revelation, but the foundations of what is commonly called Natural Religion." [46] He came to the conviction that " concerning the origin of things nothing whatever can be known." He looked upon religion as " the greatest enemy of morality," and he regarded the God of Christianity as an embodiment of the *"ne plus ultra* of wickedness." From these views he never departed. His death occurred on June 23, 1836. Mrs. Grote says, " he died without any pain or struggle, of long standing pulmonary phthisis." Francis Place wrote as follows to Mrs Grote on June 15 :—

> Stayed too long with poor Mill, who showed much more sympathy and affection than ever before in all our long friendship. But he was all the time as much of a bright reasoning man as ever he was—reconciled to his fate, brave, and calm to an extent which I never before witnessed, except in another old friend, Thomas Holcroft, the day before the day of his death.[47]

Holcroft and Place, it should be added, were both Freethinkers.

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[46] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography,* p. 38.

[47] Prof. A. Bain, *James Mill,* p. 409.

JOHN STUART MILL.

MILL was born in Rodney Street, Pentonville, London, on May 20, 1806, and he died at Avignon on May 8, 1873. Notwithstanding the unguarded admissions in the one of his *Three Essays on Religion*, which he never prepared for the press, it is certain that he lived and died a Freethinker. His father educated him without theology, and he never really imbibed any afterwards. Professor Bain, his intimate friend and his biographer, tells us that "he absented himself during his whole life from religious services," and that "in everything characteristic of the creed of Christendom he was a thorough-going negationist. He admitted neither its truth nor its utility." [48] John Morley also, in his admirably-written account of the last day he spent with Mill,[49] says that he looked forward to a general growth of the religion of Humanity.

Mill was one of the pall-bearers at Grote's funeral in 1871. He accepted the office under great pressure, and on walking out of Westminster Abbey with Professor Bain he remarked—"In no very long time, I shall be laid in the ground with a very different ceremonial from that." [50] Professor Bain observes:—

> It so happened, however, that a prayer was delivered at his own interment by the Protestant pastor at Avignon, who thereby got himself into trouble, from Mill's known scepticism, and had to write an exculpation in the local newspaper.[51]

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[48] *John Stuart Mill*, by Alexander Bain, pp. 139, 140.

[49] *Miscellanies*, Vol. III.

[50] Bain, p. 133.

[51] *Ibid*, 133.

This pastor had become friendly with Mill at Avignon. According to Professor Bain, he was "a very intelligent and liberal-minded man." When the *Démocratie du Midi* announced that Mill had received *les derniers secours de la religion* (the last consolations of religion) on his death-bed, M. Rey honourably denied the statement, and said, *Il n'y avait point de pasteur près du lit de M. Mill*—"There was no clergyman at Mr. Mill's bedside." [52]

Mill died of erysipelas consequent on a fall. Three days before his death he walked fifteen miles. Dr. Gurney thus describes his last hours:—

> Mr. Mill suffered but little, except in swallowing, and from the heat and weight of the enormous swelling, which, by the time I arrived from Nice, had already spread over his face and neck; and yet he learned from me on my arrival the fatal nature of the attack with calmness and resignation. His express desire that he might not lose his mental faculties was gratified, for his great intellect remained clear to the last moment. His wish that his funeral might be quiet and simple, as indeed, his every wish, was attended to by his loving step-daughter with devoted solicitude." [53]

Mill's death was not misrepresented in England. On the contrary, one religious journal, which died itself soon afterwards, declared its opinion that his soul was burning in hell, and expressed a hearty wish that his disciples would soon follow him.

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[52] M. Rey's letter is given in *La Critique Philosophique*, June 5, 1873, p. 283.

[53] *Daily News*, May 12, 1873.

MIRABEAU.

Gabriel Honore Riquetti, son and heir of the Marquis de Mirabeau, was born on March 9, 1747. He came of a wild strong stock, and was a magnificent "enormous" fellow at his birth, the head being especially great. The turbulent life of the man has been graphically told by Carlyle in his *Essays* and in the *French Revolution*. Faults he had many, but not that of insincerity; with all his failings, he was a gigantic mass of veracious humanity. "Moralities not a few," says Carlyle, "must shriek condemnatory over this Mirabeau; the Morality by which he could be judged has not yet got uttered in the speech of men."

Mirabeau's work in the National Assembly belongs to history. It was mighty and splendid, but it cannot be recited here. In January, 1791, he sat as President of the Assembly, with his neck bandaged after the application of leeches. At parting he said to Dumont, "I am dying, my friend; dying as by slow fire." On the 27th of March he stood in the tribune for the last time. Four days later he was on his death-bed. Crowds beset the street, anxious but silent, and stopping all traffic so that their hero might not be disturbed. A bulletin was issued every three hours. "On Saturday, the second day of April," says Carlyle, "Mirabeau feels that the last of the Days has risen for him; that on this day he has to depart and be no more. His death is Titanic, as his life has been. Lit up, for the last time, in the glare of the coming dissolution, the mind of the man is all glowing and burning; utters itself in sayings, such as men long remember. He longs to live, yet acquiesces in death, argues not with the inexorable." [54]

[54] *French Revolution*, Vol. II., p. 120.

Gazing out on the Spring sun, Mirabeau said, *Si ce n'est pas là Dieu, c'est du moins son cousin germain*—If that is not God, it is at least his cousin german. It was the great utterance of an eighteenth century Pagan, looking across the mists of Christian superstition to the saner nature-worship of antiquity.

Power of speech gone, Mirabeau made signs for paper and pen, and wrote the word *dormir,* "to sleep." Cabanis, the great physician, who stood beside him, pretended not to understand this passionate request for opium. Thereupon, writes the doctor, "he made a sign for the pen and paper to be brought to him again, and wrote, 'Do you think that Death is dangerous?'—Seeing that I did not comply with his demand, he wrote again, '. . . How can you leave your friend on the wheel, perhaps for days?'" Cabanis and Dr. Petit decided to give him a sedative. While it was sent for "the pains became atrocious." Recovering speech a little under the torture, he turned to M. de la Marck, saying, "You deceive me." "No," replied his friend, "we are not deceiving you, the remedy is coming, we all saw it ordered." "Ah, the doctors, the doctors!" he muttered. Then, turning to Cabanis, with a look of mingled anger and tenderness, he said, "Were you not my doctor and my friend? Did you not promise to spare me the agonies of such a death? Do you wish me to expire with a regret that I trusted you?"

"Those words," says Cabinis, "the last that he uttered, ring incessantly in my ears. He turned over on the right side with a convulsive movement, and at half-past eight in the morning he expired in our arms." [55] Dr. Petit, standing at the foot of the

[55] *Journal de la Maladie et de la Mort d'Honoré-Gabriel Mirabeau.* Paris, 1791, p. 263.

bed, said, "His sufferings are ended." "So dies," writes Carlyle, "a gigantic Heathen and Titan; stumbling blindly, undismayed, down to his rest."

Mirabeau was an Atheist, and he was buried as became his philosophy and his greatness. The Assembly decreed a Public Funeral, there was a procession a league in length, and the very roofs, trees, and lamp-posts, were covered with people. The Church of Sainte-Geneviève was turned into a Pantheon for the Great Men of the Fatherland, *Aux Grands Hommes la Patrie Reconnaissante.* It was midnight ere the ceremonies ended, and the mightiest man in France was left in the darkness and silence to his long repose. Of him, more than most men, it might well have been said, "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well." Dormir, "to sleep," he wrote in his dying agony. Death had no terror for him; it was only the ringing down of the curtain at the end of the drama.

WILHELM OSTWALD.

OSTWALD was born at Riga in 1853. For a time he was a professor in the University of Leipzig and earned international fame as a chemist. He was for some years President of the German Monists' Union, of which he was a member at the time of his death. In *Individuality and Immortality* (1906) he said that death is not an evil but a necessary factor in the existence of the race. Beyond the hope that his work had contributed something to the mental equipment of humanity he had no desire whatever for a future life.

He died on April 4, 1932. At the funeral the appearance of a pastor in clerical gown, who delivered

an address, in which he declared that " as a scientist Ostwald had not trodden the pathway of theology," excited amazement among the friends of the deceased. After several others had spoken a representative of the Monists' Union was allowed to speak for a few minutes on promising the relatives not to say anything against the Church or religion. (*Die Geistesfreheit*, Leipzig, May 1, 1932).

ROBERT OWEN.

ROBERT OWEN, whose name was once a terror to the clergy and the privileged classes, was born at Newtown, Montgomeryshire, on May 14, 1771. In his youth he noticed the inconsistency of professing Christians, and on studying the various religions of the world, as he tells us in his Autobiography, he found that "one and all had emanated from the same source, and their varieties from the same false imaginations of our early ancestors." We have no space to narrate his long life, his remarkable prosperity in cotton spinning, his experiments in the education of children, his disputes with the clergy, and his efforts at social reform, to which he devoted his time and wealth, with singular disinterestedness and simplicity. At one time his influence even with the upper classes was remarkable, but he seriously impaired it in 1817, by honestly stating, at a great meeting at the City of London Tavern, that it was useless to hope for real reform while people were besotted by " the gross errors that have been combined with the fundamental notions of every religion." After many more years of labour for the cause he loved, Owen quietly passed away on November 17,

1858, at the great age of eighty-eight. His last hours are described in the following letter by his son, Robert Dale Owen, which appeared in the newspapers of the time, and is preserved in Mr. G. J. Holyoake's *Last Days of Robert Owen* :—

> " Newtown, November 17, 1858.—My dear father passed away this morning, at a quarter before seven, and passed away as gently and quietly as if he had fallen asleep. There was not the least struggle, not a contraction of a limb, of a muscle, not an expression of pain on his face. His breathing gradually became slower and slower, until at last it ceased so imperceptibly, that, even as I held his hand, I could scarcely tell the moment when he no longer breathed. His last words distinctly pronounced about twenty minutes before his death, were ' Relief has come.' About half an hour before he said ' Very easy and comfortable.' "

Owen's remains were interred in the churchyard of St. Mary's, Newtown, and as the law then stood, the minister had a right, which he exercised, of reading the Church of England burial service over the heretic's coffin, and the Freethinkers who stood round the grave had to bear the mockery as quietly as possible. In Owen's case, as in Carlile's, the Church appropriated the heretic's corpse. Even Darwin's body rests in Westminster Abbey, and that is all of him the Church can boast.

THOMAS PAINE.

GEORGE WASHINGTON has been called the hero of American Independence, but Thomas Paine shares with him the honour. The sword of the one, and the pen of the other, were both necessary in the con-

flict which prepared the ground for building the Republic of the United States. While the farmer-general fought with unabated hope in the darkest hours of misfortune, the soldier-author wrote the stirring appeals which kindled and sustained enthusiasm in the sacred cause of liberty. *Common Sense* was the precursor of the Declaration of Independence. *The Rights of Man,* subsequently written and published in England, advocated the same principles where they were equally required. Replied to by Government in a prosecution for treason, it brought the author so near to the gallows that he was only saved by flight. Learning afterwards that *The Rights of Man* can never be realized while the people are deluded and degraded by priestcraft and superstition, Paine attacked Christianity in *The Age of Reason.* That vigorous, logical, and witty volume has converted thousands of Christians to Freethought. It was answered by bishops, denounced by the clergy, and prosecuted for blasphemy. But it was eagerly read in fields and workshops, brave men fought round it as a standard of freedom; and before the battle ended the face of society was changed.

Thomas Paine was born at Thetford, in Norfolk, on January 29, 1736. His scepticism began at the early age of eight, when he was shocked by a sermon on the Atonement, which represented God as killing his own son when he could not revenge himself in any other way. Becoming acquainted with Dr. Franklin in London, Paine took his advice and emigrated to America in the autumn of 1774. A few months later his *Common Sense* announced the advent of a masterly writer. More than a hundred thousand copies were sold, yet Paine lost money by the pamphlet, for he issued it, like all his other writings, at the lowest price that promised to cover expenses.

Congress, in 1777, appointed him Secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Eight years later it granted him three thousand dollars on account of his "early, unsolicited, and continued labours in explaining the principles of the late Revolution." In the same year the State of Pennsylvania presented him with £500, and the State of New York gave him three hundred acres of valuable land.

Returning to England in 1787, Paine devoted his abilities to engineering. He invented the arched iron bridge, and the first structure of that kind in the world, the cast-iron bridge over the Wear at Sunderland, was made from his model. Yet he appears to have derived no more profit from this than from his writings.

Burke's *Reflections* appeared in 1790. Paine lost no time in replying, and his *Rights of Man* was sold by the hundred thousand. The Government tried to suppress the work by bribery; and that failing, a prosecution was begun. Paine's defence was conducted by Erskine, but the jury returned a verdict of Guilty "without the trouble of deliberation." The intended victim of despotism was, however, beyond its reach. He had been elected by the departments of Calais and Versailles to sit in the National Assembly. A splendid reception awaited him at Calais, and his journey to Paris was marked by popular demonstrations. At the trial of Louis XVI., he spoke and voted for banishment instead of execution. He was one of the Committee appointed to frame the Constitution of 1793, but in the close of that year, having become obnoxious to the Terrorists, he was deprived of his seat as "a foreigner," and imprisoned in the Luxembourg for no better reason. At the time of his arrest he had written the first part of *The Age of Reason*. While in prison he composed the

second part, and as he expected every day to be guillotined, it was penned in the very presence of Death.

Liberated on the fall of Robespierre, Paine returned to America; not, however, without great difficulty, for the British cruisers were ordered to intercept him. From 1802 till his death he wrote and published many pamphlets on religious and other topics, including the third part of *The Age of Reason.* His last years were full of pain, caused by an abscess in the side, which was brought on by his imprisonment in Paris. He expired, after intense suffering, on June 8, 1809, placidly and without a struggle.[56]

Paine's last hours were disturbed by pious visitors who wished to save his immortal soul from the wrath of God :—

> One afternoon a very old lady, dressed in a large scarlet-hooded cloak, knocked at the door and inquired for Thomas Paine. Mr. Jarvis, with whom Mr. Paine resided, told her he was asleep. "I am very sorry," she said, "for that, for I want to see him particularly." Thinking it a pity to make an old woman call twice, Mr. Jarvis took her into Mr. Paine's bedroom and awoke him. He rose upon one elbow; then, with an expression of eye that made the old woman stagger back a step or two, he asked, "What do you want?" "Is your name Paine?" "Yes." "Well, then, I come from Almighty God to tell you, that if you do not repent of your sins, and believe in our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, you will be damned and—" "Poh, poh, it is not true; you were not sent with any such impertinent message: Jarvis make her go away—pshaw! he would not send such a foolish ugly old woman about his messages : go away, go back, shut the door." [57]

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[56] *Life of Thomas Paine.* By Clio Rickman. 1819. p. 187.
[57] Rickman, pp. 182-183.

Two weeks before his death, his conversion was attempted by two Christian ministers, the Rev. Mr. Milledollar and the Rev. Mr. Cunningham :—

> The latter gentleman said, "Mr. Paine, we visit you as friends and neighbours; you have now a full view of death, you cannot live long, and whoever does not believe in Jesus Christ will assuredly be damned." "Let me," said Mr. Paine, "have none of your popish stuff; get away with you, good morning, good morning." The Rev. Mr. Milledollar attempted to address him, but he was interrupted in the same language. When they were gone he said to Mrs. Heddon, his housekeeper, "do not let them come here again; they intrude upon me." They soon renewed their visit, but Mrs. Hedden told them they could not be admitted, and that she thought the attempt useless, for if God did not change his mind, she was sure no human power could.[58]

Another of these busybodies was the Rev. Mr. Hargrove, a Swedenborgian or New Jerusalemite minister. This gentleman told Paine that his sect had found the key for interpreting the Scriptures, which had been lost for four thousand years. "Then," said Paine, "it must have been very rusty."

Even his medical attendant did not scruple to assist in this pious enterprise. Dr. Manley's letter to Cheetham, one of Paine's biographers, says that he visited the dying sceptic at midnight, June 5-6, two days before he expired. After tormenting him with many questions, to which he made no answer, Dr. Manley proceeded as follows :—

> Mr. Paine, you have not answered my questions; will you answer them? Allow me to ask again, do you believe, or—let me qualify the question—do you wish to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

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[58] Rickman, p. 184.

> After a pause of some minutes he answered, " I have no wish to believe on that subject." I then left him, and know not whether he afterwards spoke to any person on the subject.

Sherwin confirms this statement. He prints a letter from Mr. Clark, who spoke to Dr. Manley on the subject. " I asked him plainly," said Mr. Clark, " Did Mr. Paine recant his religious sentiments? I would thank you for an explicit answer, sir. He said, "No, he did not." [59]

Mr. Willet Hicks, a Quaker gentleman who frequently called on Paine in his last illness, as a friend and not as a soul-snatcher, bears similar testimony. " In some serious conversation I had with him a short time before his death," declared Mr. Hicks, " he said his sentiments respecting the Christian religion were precisely the same as they were when he wrote *The Age of Reason*." [60]

Lastly, we have the testimony of Cheetham himself, who was compelled to apologize for libelling Paine during his life, and whose biography of the great sceptic is a continuous libel. Even Cheetham is bound to admit that Paine " died as he had lived, an enemy to the Christian religion."

Notwithstanding this striking harmony of evidenec as to Paine's dying in the principles of Freethought, the story of his " recantation " gradually developed, until at last it was told to the children in Sunday-schools, and even published by the Religious Tract Society. Nay, it is being circulated to this very day, as no less true than the Gospel itself, although it was triumphantly exposed by William Cobbett over a century ago. " This is not a question of religion," said

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[59] Sherwin's *Life of Paine*, p. 225.
[60] Cheetham's *Life of Paine*, p. 152.

Cobbett, "it is a question of moral truth. Whether Mr. Paine's opinions were correct or erroneous, has nothing to do with this matter."

Cobbett investigated the libel on Paine on the very spot where it originated. Getting to the bottom of the matter, he found that the source of the mischief was Mary Hinsdale, who had formerly been a servant to Mr. Willet Hicks. This gentleman sent Paine many little delicacies in his last illness, and Mary Hinsdale conveyed them. According to her story, Paine made a recantation in her presence, and assured her that if ever the Devil had an agent on earth, he who wrote *The Age of Reason* was undoubtedly that person. When she was hunted out by Cobbett, however, "she shuffled, she evaded, she affected not to understand," and finally said she had "no recollection of any person or thing she saw at Thomas Paine's house." Cobbett's summary of the whole matter commends itself to every sensible reader:—

> This is, I think, a pretty good instance of the lengths to which hypocrisy will go. The whole story, as far as it related to recantation . . . is a lie from beginning to end. Mr. Paine declares in his last Will that he retains all his publicly expressed opinions as to religion. His executors, and many other gentlemen of undoubted veracity, had the same declaration from his dying lips. Mr. Willett Hicks visited him to nearly the last. This gentleman says that there was no change of opinion intimated to him; and will any man believe that Paine would have withheld from Mr. Hicks that which he was so forward to communicate to Mr. Hicks's servant girl?[61]

We have to remember that the first part of *The Age of Reason* was entrusted to Joel Barlow, when Paine

[61] *Republican*, February 13, 1824, Vol. IX., p. 221.

was imprisoned at Paris, and the second part was written in gaol in the very presence of Death. Dr. Bond, an English surgeon, who was by no means friendly to Paine's opinions, visited him in the Luxembourg, and gave the following testimony:—

> Mr. Paine, while hourly expecting to die, read to me parts of his *Age of Reason;* and every night when I left him to be separately locked up, and expected not to see him alive in the morning, he always expressed his firm belief in the principles of that book, and begged I would tell the world such were his dying opinions.[62]

Surely when a work was written in such circumstances it is absurd to charge the author with recanting his opinions through fear of death. Citing once more the words of his enemy Cheetham, it is incontestible that Thomas Paine "died as he had lived, an enemy to the Christian religion."

One of Paine's intimate friends, Colonel Fellows, was met by Walt Whitman, the American poet, soon after 1840 in New York. Whitman became well-acquainted with the Colonel, who was then about seventy-eight years of age, and described him as "a remarkably fine old man." From conversations with him, Whitman became convinced that Paine had been greatly calumniated. Thirty-five years later, addressing a meeting at Lincoln Hall, Philadelphia, on Sunday, January 28, 1887, the democratic poet said: "Thomas Paine had a noble personality, as exhibited in presence, face, voice, dress, manner, and what may be called his atmosphere and magnetism, especially the later years of his life. I am sure of it. Of the foul and foolish fictions yet told about the circumstances of his decease, the absolute fact is

[62] Rickman, p. 194.

that as he lived a good life, after its kind, he died calmly and philosophically, as became him." [63]

COURTLANDT PALMER.

COURTLANDT PALMER was born on March 25, 1843. He was of good family and independent fortune, which he taxed for the support of advanced causes. He was President of the Nineteenth Century Club in New York, established for the free discussion of "burning" questions in religion and philosophy. Among its members was Colonel Ingersoll, whom Palmer desired to speak at his grave if the malady from which he suffered should prove fatal.

Mrs. Palmer did not share her husband's Agnosticism. She felt that it would be a relief to her if some liberal Christian Minister said a few words over her husband's corpse. Out of tenderness to her feelings he consented to the proposal.

Palmer died in July, 1888. After bidding the members of his family an affectionate farewell, he said: "The general impression is that Freethinkers are afraid of death. I want you one and all to tell the whole world that you have seen a Freethinker die without the least fear of what the hereafter may be."

At the funeral, after Ingersoll had delivered the address desired by Palmer, the Rev. R. H. Newton performed a religious service on behalf of the wife and family; but he creditably refrained from any pious allusions to the dead Agnostic, and confined his brief address to a eulogy of Palmer's character.

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[63] Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days in America* (English edition), p. 150; Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, ii, 432.

RABELAIS.

FRANCOIS RABELAIS, "the grand jester of France," as Bacon calls him, was born at Chinon, in Touraine, in 1483, the same year in which Luther and Raphael saw the light. He joined the Church and became a monk. His heretical humour brought him into trouble, and he was once rescued by a military friend from the *in pace*, a form of burying alive. But this did not damp his spirits, though it made him cautious; for he dreaded the idea of being burnt alive "like a herring," seeing that he was "dry enough already by nature." He veiled his profound wisdom with the jolliest buffoonery. On one occasion he printed *âme* (soul) as *âne* (jackass) several times, and said it was a printer's blunder! "Rabelais," says Coleridge, "had no mode of speaking the truth in those days but in such a form as this"; his buffoonery was "an amulet against the monks and bigots." Despite the plain language of Pantagruel, Coleridge maintained that "the morality of the work is of the most refined and exalted kind." [64] Elsewhere the same great poet and critic said, "I could write a treatise in proof and praise of the morality and moral elevation of Rabelais' work, which would make the church stare and the conventicle groan." [65] Coleridge, indeed, classed Rabelais "with the great creative minds of the world," with Shakespeare, Dante and Cervantes.

"Attempts have been made," says Mr. Walter Besant, "to prove that Rabelais was a Christian. To suppose this is, in my mind, not only seriously to misunderstand the spirit of his book, but that of his

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[64] *Table Talk* (Bohn) p. 97.
[65] *Miscellanies, Æsthetic and Literary* (Bohn), p. 127.

time." [66] The *curé* of Meudon sapped the Church with satire from within. But on February 19, 1552, he resigned his living at Meudon and Le Mans. Mr. Besant concludes that "the old man, now that life was drawing to its close, now that his friends were dead, dispersed, and in exile, discerned at last the wickedness of continuing to say masses, which were to him empty forms, in the cause of a Church which was full of absurdities and corruptions." [67]

Many of his friends had perished in prison or at the stake, but Rabelais died a natural death in his bed. His end came, it is said, on April 9, 1553, at a house in the Rue des Jardins, Paris. Many stories were told of his death-bed, and may be found in the bibliophile Jacob's (Paul Lacroix) introduction to the Charpentier edition of Rabelais' works. When he had received the extreme unction, he said aloud that they had greased his boots for the great journey. When the priest in attendance asked if he believed in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the holy wafer, he replied meekly: "I believe in it, and I rejoice therein; for I think I see my God as he was when he entered Jerusalem triumphant and seated on an ass." Towards the end they put on his Benedictine robe; whereupon he punned upon a Psalm—*Beati qui moriuntur in Domino* ("Blessed are they who die in the Lord"). A messenger from Cardinal du Bellay being brought to the bedside, he said in a feeble voice, "Tell monseigneur I am going to seek the great Perhaps." Gathering his strength for a last effort, he cried out in a burst of laughter, "Draw the curtain, the farce is over."

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[66] *Rabelais*, by Walter Besant, p. 186.

[67] p. 46.

These stories may be partly apocryphal, yet, as Jacob remarks, they are " in keeping with the character of Rabelais and the spirit of his writings."

WINWOOD READE.

William Winwood Reade, the African traveller and naturalist, was a nephew of Charles Reade, the novelist. His researches are drawn upon in Darwin's *Descent of Man,* in the index of which his name may be distinguished. Turning his attention to literature, he wrote the *Martyrdom of Man,* a remarkable book, showing a perfect grasp of human evolution and an absolute freedom from theology. This was followed by a Freethought novel, *The Outcast.* He died on April 24, 1875. An obituary notice appeared in the London *Daily Telegraph,* on April 27, bearing unmistakable evidence of having been written by Charles Reade. It says: " He wrote his last work, *The Outcast,* with the hand of death upon him. Two zealous friends carried him out to Wimbledon, and there, for a day or two, the air seemed to revive him; but on Friday night he began to sink, and on Saturday afternoon died in the arms of his beloved uncle, Mr. Charles Reade." Winwood Reade not only rejected belief in immortality, but he regarded it as making many men and women, and even nations, " spiritual prisoners of the Shadow of Death, even while living." " From beside the grave opening to receive him," said his friend Moncure D. Conway, " he warned these life-long victims that the only victory over death is to concentrate themselves on life." (*Addresses and Reprints,* p. 273).

JOHN MACKINNON ROBERTSON.

J. M. ROBERTSON was born in the Isle of Arran on November 14, 1856. An address to the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society, in 1904, on "What to read," contains an interesting reference to the meagre education available to him as a boy:—

> You will not suppose me . . . to be satisfied with the education given in our ordinary popular schools, or with the social state of things in which young people have to begin (as I began) to work for a living at thirteen, or with the amount of leisure that is thus far possible to the mass of the workers at any age.

In the early 'eighties we find him both lecturing and writing for the Freethought cause in Edinburgh and Glasgow. In 1884 he went to London and became closely associated with Charles Bradlaugh. He worked on the *National Reformer,* which he edited after Bradlaugh's death in 1891 till the paper ceased publication in 1893. He was an omnivorous reader, and his studies embraced a very wide field. Among active workers for Freethought he was the most prolific writer that has yet appeared. The list of his published books and pamphlets in the British Museum fills twelve and a half columns of the catalogue, and this does not include all his pamphlets, to say nothing of his articles in the periodical Press. His *Short History of Freethought* is well known, and in the opinion of many Freethinkers holds the most important place in any estimate of his work. But perhaps his name will be longest remembered by the series of writings in which he discusses the problem of the historicity of Christ. This series includes *Christianity and Mythology* (1900), *The History of Christianity* (1902), *Pagan Christs* (1903), *The Historical*

Jesus (1916), *The Jesus Problem* (1917), and *Jesus and Judas* (1927). Robertson's intimate acquaintance with the literature of the subject, for and against, his wealth of illustration from Comparative Religion, and his close logical argument, make this series of writings a body of constructive criticism that stands by itself in the literature of Christology. His style was sometimes heavy but never obscure, and his scholarship was exceptionally accurate for a self-taught man.

Robertson was a determinist and, it need hardly be said, rejected the idea of the survival of personality after death. In 1900 he wrote a pamphlet, *Thomas Paine: An Investigation,* which is a scathing exposure of Christian calumnies regarding Paine's private life, and in particular of the story of his death-bed recantation.

For a few years Robertson was a member of the National Secular Society, and at the time of his death was an honorary associate of the Rationalist Press Association.

In 1895 he stood as an independent Radical candidate for Northampton, Bradlaugh's old constituency, but was defeated. From 1906 to 1918, however, he represented in the House of Commons the Tyneside Division, Northumberland, as a Liberal, and during four years of this period he was Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Trade.

For some months previously to his death Robertson's health had been failing. He attended a meeting of the Bradlaugh Centenary Committee in December. On Thursday January 5, 1933, he was at work on two books which he was writing, and in the evening was listening-in to a wireless talk on Saving, a subject in which he had long been keenly interested. Shortly afterwards he had a " stroke," and with it the end had come. His remains were cremated on January 7,

and in accordance with his own oft-expressed wish there was no ceremony of any kind at the funeral.

Authorities: Robertson's works and *The Literary Guide,* February, 1933.

MADAME ROLAND.

AMONG the Girondists who perished in 1793 was Madame Roland. She was nourished on scepticism, complains Carlyle; but he allows her "as brave a heart as ever beat in woman's bosom." "Like a white Grecian statue," he says, "serenely complete, she shines in that black wreck of things." While in prison she bore herself with fortitude, writing her Memoirs, and addressing cheerful letters to her daughter, her husband, and her friends. Feeling that she was doomed, she determined to go before the Revolutionary Tribunal alone. M. Chaveau-Lagarde, a lawyer, wished to defend her, but she declined his services. "You would lose your life," she said, "without saving mine. I know my doom. To-morrow I shall cease to exist." On October 9 she was driven in the tumbril to the guillotine, clad in white, with her long black hair hanging down to her girdle. With her was a prisoner named Lamarche, whom she endeavoured to cheer. She renounced her right to be executed first, so that her dejected companion might be spared the pain of seeing her blood. Samson would not consent to this. "Will you," she gaily asked, "refuse a lady her last request?" and he yielded. "O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" she exclaimed, but she bowed before the statue nevertheless, knowing that Liberty was holy though worshipped mistakenly with cruel rites.

She said her husband would not survive her, and he did not. On learning her fate, he left the kind friends who were harbouring him at Rouen, and the next day he was found dead at the foot of a tree on the road to Paris. He had thrust a cane-sword into his own heart. Beside him was a letter, in which he said that he "died, as he lived, virtuous and honest," refusing to "remain longer on an earth polluted with crimes." The most touching feature in the suicide of this stern Republican and Freethinker was the fact that by taking his own life, and anticipating the Tribunal, he secured his property to his daughter.

Authorities: Carlyle, *French Revolution,* Bk. V., chap. ii. Barrière, *Mémoires Particuliers de Mme. Roland.*

GEORGE SAND.

George Sand was the pen-name of Amantine Lucile Aurore Dudnevant. Her maiden name was Dupin. She was born at Paris on July 5, 1804, and she died at Nohant on June 8, 1876, after establishing her fame as one of the finest of French prose writers. She believed in God, says Plauchat, but "certainly not in the vengeful and merciless God of the orthodox." Her last work was a critical notice of Renan's *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques* in *Le Temps,* only a month before her decease. Towards the end of May she took to her bed, from which she never rose again. She was suffering from internal paralysis, and medical skill was of no avail. On the 8th of June, at nine in the morning, she "expired in calm-

ness and serenity." [68] Before the end she said: "It is death; I do not ask for it, but neither do I regret it." [69] George Sand's biographer in English, Bertha Thomas, writes:—

> Up to the last hour she preserved consciousness and lucidity. The words, "Ne touchez pas à la verdure," among the last that fell from her lips, were understood by her children, who knew her wish that the tree should be undisturbed under which in the village cemetery she was soon to find a resting-place.[70]

Such was the peaceful death of the great writer, whom Mrs. Browning hailed in two glorious sonnets as "large-brained woman and large-hearted man," and whom Flaubert himself addressed as "chère maître."

JOHANN CHRISTOPH FRIEDRICH SCHILLER.

SCHILLER, after Goethe the greatest of the German poets, was born in 1759. Though he was brought up in a religious atmosphere, Christianity never exercised any serious influence on him and he had little respect for it as a factor in cultural progress. His *History of the Thirty Years' War* shows that he regarded that struggle as something more than a local contest; it was a revolt against the spirit of authority inherent in all dogmatic religion. His hold even on theism was slight. In a letter to Goethe he wrote:—

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[68] Plauchat, *Galérie Contemporaine*, Pt. II.

[69] *George Sand*, by Bertha Thomas, p. 245.

[70] *Ibid.*

> A healthy poetic nature wants, as you yourself say, no moral law, no rights of man, no political metaphysics. You might have added as well, it wants no deity, immortality, to stay and support itself withal.

His *Gods of Greece,* to which Mrs. E. B. Browning replied in *Pan is Dead,* gave offence to many of the orthodox, and he afterwards erased part of it. The Greek gods, he felt, had vanished from the world and taken with them all that was fairest in colour and sound, leaving us the husk of the word. In his poem *Resignation,* he makes the unbeliever say that the illusions of superstition are holy only because they are covered up by the giant shadow of our own fears.

Schiller's best works were written during the last fifteen years of his life, every day of which brought its load of pain. He died on May 9, 1805. Carlyle gives a detailed account of the poet's last illness:—

> Feeling that his end was come, he addressed himself to meet it as became him; not with affected carelessness or superstitious fear, but with the quiet unpretending manliness which had marked the tenor of his life. Of his friends and family he took a touching but a tranquil farewell; he ordered that his funeral should be private, without pomp or parade. Someone inquiring how he felt, he said, "*Calmer and calmer*"; simple but memorable words, expressive of the mild heroism of the man. About six he sank into a deep sleep; once for a moment he looked up with a lively air, and said, "*Many things were growing plain and clear to him!*" Again he closed his eyes; and his sleep deepened and deepened, till it changed into the sleep from which there is no awakening; and all that remained of Schiller was a lifeless form, soon to be mingled with the clods of the valley. (*Life of Schiller,* p. 166.)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

THIS glorious poet of Atheism and Republicanism was born at Field Place, near Horsham, Sussex, on August 4, 1792. His whole life was a daring defiance of the tyranny of Custom. In 1811, when less than nineteen, he was expelled from Oxford University for writing *The Necessity of Atheism.* After writing *Queen Mab* and several political pamphlets, besides visiting Ireland to assist the cause of reform in that unhappy island, he was deprived of the guardianship of his two children by Lord Chancellor Eldon on account of his heresy. Leaving England, he went to Italy, where his principal poems were composed with remarkable rapidity during the few years of life left him. His death occurred on July 8, 1822. He was barely thirty, yet he had made for himself a deathless fame as the greatest lyrical poet in English literature.

Shelley was drowned in a small yacht off Leghorn. The only other occupants of the boat were his friend Williams and a sailor lad, both of whom shared his fate. The squall which submerged them was too swift to allow of their taking proper measures for their safety. Shelley's body was recovered. In one pocket was a volume of Æschylus, in the other a copy of Keats's poems, doubled back as if hastily thrust away. He had evidently been reading "Isabella," and "Lamia," and the waves cut short his reading for ever. It was an ideal end, although so premature; for Shelley was fascinated by the sea, and always expressed a preference for death by drowning. His remains were cremated on the sea-coast, in presence of Leigh Hunt, Trelawny, and Byron. Trelawny snatched the heart from the flames, and it is still preserved by Sir Percy Shelley. The

ashes were coffered, and soon after buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, close by the old cemetery, where Keats was interred—a beautiful open space, covered in summer with violets and daisies, of which Shelley himself had written "It might make one in love with death to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place." Trelawny planted six young cypresses and four laurels. On the tomb-stone was inscribed a Latin epitaph by Leigh Hunt, to which Trelawny added three lines from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, one of Shelley's favourite plays.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY,
COR CORDIUM.
Natus iv. Aug. MDCCXCII.
Obiit. vii. Jul. MDCCCXXII.
"Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

And there at Rome, shadowed by cypress and laurel, covered with sweet flowers, and surrounded by the crumbling ruins of a dead empire, rests the heart of hearts.

Shelley's Atheism cannot be seriously disputed, and Trelawny makes a memorable protest against the foolish and futile attempts to explain it away :—

> The principal fault I have to find is that the Shelleyan writers being Christians themselves, seem to think that a man of genius cannot be an Atheist, and so they strain their own faculties to disprove what Shelley asserted from the very earliest stage of his career to the last day of his life. He ignored all religions as superstitions . . . A clergyman wrote in the visitors' book at the Mer de Glace, Chamouni, something to the following effect: "No one can view this sublime scene, and deny the existence of God." Under which Shelley, using a Greek phrase, wrote "P. B. Shelley, Athe-

ist," thereby proclaiming his opinion to all the world. And he never regretted having done so.[71]

Trelawny's words should be printed on the forefront of Shelley's works, so that it might never be forgotten that " the poet of poets and purest of men" was an Atheist.

HERBERT SPENCER.

SPENCER was born at Derby in 1820. His parents were originally Methodists, but at an early age he showed an inclination to think for himself in theological matters. He will always be remembered as the first who used the word " evolution " to express a philosophic view of the universe as a whole, consistently maintaining that evolutionary principles apply alike to the organic and the inorganic world. (*First Principles,* 6th ed. pp. 218-224; *On the Study of Sociology,* pp. 6, 46). Another important part of his teaching is his insistence on the need of the complete secularization of morals. He is the best known of the expounders of Agnosticism, the view that man is incapable of assured knowledge concerning " ultimate reality."

In *Facts and Comments* (p. 201), written the year before his death, he denies emphatically the common Christian assertion that Freethinkers " occupy themselves exclusively with material interests." But he finds no ground whatever for belief in a future life, which is a superstition handed down from the savage. As there is no evidence of the existence of conscious-

[71] *Records of Byron and Shelley,* Vol. I., pp. 243-245.

ness apart from brain, " we seem obliged to relinquish the thought that consciousness continued after physical organization has become inactive."

Spencer " passed peacefully away " on December 8, 1903, and his remains were cremated at Golder's Green. On September 16 he wrote to John Morley stating that he contemplated the end " as not far off—an end to which I look forward with satisfaction "—and that he had " interdicted any such ceremony as is performed over the bodies or ashes of those who adhere to the current creed."

Authority: D. Duncan, *The Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, 1908.

BENEDICT SPINOZA.

Benedict Spinoza (Baruch Despinosa) was born in Amsterdam on November 24, 1632. His father was one of the Jewish fugitives from Spain who settled in the Netherlands to escape the dreaded Inquisition. With a delicate constitution, and a mind more prone to study than amusement, the boy Spinoza gave himself to learning and meditation. He was soon compelled to break away from the belief of his family and his teachers; and after many vain admonitions, he was at length excommunicated. His anathema was pronounced in the Synagogue on July 27, 1656. It was a frightful formula, cursing him by day and night, waking and sleeping, sitting and standing, and prohibiting every Jew from holding any communication with him, or approaching him within a distance of four cubits. Of course it involved his exile from home, and soon afterwards he narrowly escaped a fanatic's dagger.

The rest of Spinoza's life was almost entirely that of a scholar. He earned a scanty livelihood by polishing lenses, but his physical wants were few, and he subsisted on a few pence per day. His writings are such as the world will not willingly let die, and his *Ethics* places him on the loftiest heights of philosophy, where his equals and companions may be counted on the fingers of a single hand. Through Goethe and Heine, he exercised a potent influence on Germany and therefore on European thought. His subtle Pantheism identifies God with Nature, and denies to deity all the attributes of personality.

His personal appearance is described by Colerus, the Dutch pastor, who some years after his death gathered all the information about him that could be procured. He was of middle height and slenderly built; with regular features, a broad and high forehead, large dark lustrous eyes, full dark eyebrows, and long curling hair of the same hue. His character was worthy of his intellect. He made no enemies except by his opinions. "Even bitter opponents," as Dr. Martineau says, "could not but own that he was singularly blameless and exacting, kindly and disinterested. Children, young men, servants, all who stood to him in any relation of dependence, seem to have felt the charm of his affability and sweetness of temper." [72]

Spinoza was lodging, at the time of his death, with a poor Dutch family at the Hague. They appear to have regarded him with veneration, and to have given him every attention. But the climate was too rigorous for his Southern temperament.

> The strict and sober regimen which was recommended by frugality was not unsuited to his delicate constitution; but, in spite of it, his emaciation in-

[72] *A Study of Spinoza.* By Dr. James Martineau, p. 104.

creased, and, though he made no change in his habits, he became so far aware of his decline as on Sunday, February 20, 1677, to send for his medical friend Meyer from Amsterdam. That afternoon Van der Spijck and his wife had been to church, in preparation for the Shrovetide communion next day, and on their return at 4 p.m., Spinoza had come downstairs and, whilst smoking his pipe, talked with them long about the sermon. He went early to bed; but was up again next morning (apparently before the arrival of Meyer), in time to come down and converse with his host and hostess before they went to church. The timely appearance of the physician enabled her to leave over the fire a fowl to be boiled for a basin of broth. This, as well as some of the bird itself, Spinoza took with a relish, on their return from church about mid-day. There was nothing to prevent the Van der Spijcks from going to the afternoon service. But on coming out of the church they were met by the startling news that at 3 p.m. Spinoza had died; no one being with him but his physician.[73]

Dr. Martineau hints that perhaps "the philosopher and the physician had arranged together and carried out a method of euthanasia," but as he admits that "there is no tittle of evidence" for such a thing, it is difficult to understand why he makes such a gratuitous suggestion.

Pious people, who judged every philosopher to be an Atheist, reported that Spinoza had cried out several times in dying, "Oh God, have mercy on me, a miserable sinner!" Colerus investigated this story and found it an invention. Dr. Meyer was the only person with Spinoza when he died, so that it was impossible for the scandal-mongers to have heard his last words. Besides, his hostess denied the truth of all

[73] *Ibid*, pp. 101, 102.

such statements, adding that " what persuaded her of the contrary was that, since he began to fail, he had always shown in his sufferings a stoical fortitude." [74]

DAVID FREDERICK STRAUSS.

STRAUSS's life of Jesus once excited universal controversy in the Christian world, and the author's name was opprobrious in orthodox circles. So important was the work, that it was translated into French by Littré, and into English by George Eliot. Subsequently, Strauss published a still more heterodox book, *The Old Faith and the New,* in which he asserts that " if we would speak as honest, upright men, we must acknowledge we are no longer Christians," and strenuously repudiates all the dogmas of theology as founded on ignorance and superstition.

This eminent German Freethinker died in the Spring of 1874, of cancer in the stomach, one of the most excruciating disorders.

> But in these very sufferings the mental greatness and moral strength of the sufferer proclaimed their most glorious victory. He was fully aware of his condition. With unshaken firmness he adhered to the convictions which he had openly acknowledged in his last work (*The Old Faith and the New*), and he never for a moment repented having written them. But with these convictions he met death with such repose and with such unclouded serenity of mind, that it was impossible to leave his sick room without the impression of a moral sanctity which we all the more surely receive from greatness of soul and

[74] *La Vie de Spinoza,* par Colerus; Saisset's *Œuvres de Spinoza,* Vol. II., p. xxxvii.

> mastery of mind over matter, the stronger are the hindrances in the surmounting of which it is manifested.[75]

Strauss left directions for his funeral. He expressly forbade all participation of the Church in the ceremony, but on the day of his interment a sum of money was to be given to the poor. "On February 10 (1874) therefore," says his biographer, " he was buried without ringing of bells or the presence of a clergyman, but in the most suitable manner, and amid the lively sympathy of all, far and near."

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

SWINBURNE was born in London in 1837. He was brought up piously, but before his twenty-first year had abandoned all belief in Christianity. The choruses in *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865), and *Erechtheus* (1876), dramas cast in the mould of ancient Greek tragedy; *Poems and Ballads* (1866); and *Songs Before Sunrise* (1871) stamp him as one of the world's greatest lyric poets. These poems and his odes and sonnets show both his marvellous sense of the music of words and his intense antipathy to all forms of religious or political tyranny. For Swinburne lyric poetry was the medium through which he expressed himself as the missionary of Freethought and Republicanism to a continent that boasted of its spiritual heritage, but was really fettered by a superstition which the best minds of classical antiquity would have rejected with scorn. This note is resonant in "The

[75] Edward Zeller, *David Frederick Strauss in his Life and Writings*, p. 148.

Hymn of Man," and "Mater Triumphalis." The second of the sonnets entitled "Two Leaders"—Newman and Carlyle are meant—may be quoted as affording an insight into Swinburne's Atheism as an expression of his revolt against the God-and-King idea:—

> With all our hearts we praise you whom ye hate,
> High souls that hate us; for our hopes are higher,
> And higher than yours the goal of our desire,
> Though high your ends be as your hearts are great.
> Your world of Gods and Kings, of shrine and state,
> Was of the night when hope and fear stood nigher,
> Wherein man walked by light of stars and fire
> Till man by day stood equal to his fate.
> Honour not hate we give you, love not fear,
> Last prophets of past kind, who fill the dome
> Of great dead gods with wrath and wail, nor hear
> Time's word and man's: "Go honoured hence, go home,
> Night's childless children; here your hour is done;
> Pass with the stars, and leave us with the sun."

He rejected utterly the idea of a future life. This is seen again and again in his poetry, but unmistakably in the *Garden of Proserpine*.

Swinburne died very peacefully on April 10, 1909. Up to the last he chatted cheerfully with his friends, and his illness was brief and almost painless. He was buried in the cemetery of Bonchurch, "in the midst of the graves of his family." This is the story as related by Edmund Gosse in *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (1917). But Mr. Gosse has suppressed an important part of the story. Swinburne left instructions in his will that there should be no religious ceremony at his funeral. Yet his sole executor, Theodore Watts-Dunton, allowed the rector of Bonchurch to read part of the Church of England burial service, and to offer some pious reflections of his own. Several of those present cried "Shame!"

It was "shame" awarded to the dead body of the man who had protested so vehemently against the betrayal of his friend Burton (*Freethinker*, April 25, 1909).

JOSEPH SYMES.

SYMES was born at Portland on January 29, 1841. Brought up a Methodist, in 1864 he offered himself as candidate for the Ministry and was sent to the Wesleyan College, Richmond. In 1867 he went on circuit as a preacher, but within five years found the fundamental doctrines of Christianity incredible and resigned. He delivered his first Freethought lecture at Newcastle, on December 17, 1876, and later contributed to the *National Reformer* and the *Freethinker*. He offered to conduct the latter in 1883 during Foote's imprisonment. At the end of this year he went to Melbourne, where he established the *Liberator*.

During the twenty-three years that Symes spent in Australia his life was one continuous battle for Freethought. Not only was he constantly in the courts for a considerable part of this period, but he was also lecturing, debating, editing his paper, and writing pamphlets. For details of this work the reader must refer to his series of articles in the *Freethinker* (1906), "My Twenty Years' Fight for Freethought in Australia." Among his numerous pamphlets may be mentioned: *Christianity at the Bar of Science; Christianity Essentially a Persecuting Religion*: and *The Life and Death of my Religion*. One of his favourite lecture-subjects was, "The Christ of the New Testament not Historic but Dramatic."

Symes returned to England in 1906, and died on December 29 of the same year. The conclusion of a series of articles, "They are coming round," appeared in the *Freethinker* of December 30. He was in harness till within a few days of his death. Shortly before his last illness, which came very suddenly, he spoke to Foote, with some feeling of pride, of the way in which he was standing the English winter. "A few days afterwards he was very ill, but he refused to have a doctor until Christmas night." (The *Freethinker*, January 6, 1907).

JOHN TOLAND.

TOLAND was one of the first to call himself a Freethinker. He was born at Redcastle, near Londonderry, in Ireland, on November 30, 1670; and he died at Putney on March 11, 1722. His famous work, *Christianity not Mysterious* was brought before Parliament, condemned as heretical, and ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. One member proposed that the author himself should be burnt; and as Thomas Aikenhead had been hanged at Edinburgh for blasphemy in the previous year, it is obvious that Toland incurred great danger in publishing his views.

Among other writings, Toland's *Letters to Serena* achieved distinction. They were translated into French by the famous Baron D'Holbach, and Lange, in his great *History of Materialism*, says that "the second letter handles the kernel of the whole question of Materialism." Lange also says that "Toland is one of those benevolent beings who exhibit to us a good character in the complete harmony of all the sides of human existence."

For some years before his death, Toland lived in obscure lodgings with a carpenter at Putney. His health was broken, and his circumstances were poor. His last illness was painful, but he bore it with great fortitude. According to one of his most intimate friends, he looked earnestly at those in the room a few minutes before breathing his last, and on being asked if he wanted anything, he answered, " I want nothing but death." His biographer, Des Maizeaux, says that " he looked upon death without the least perturbation of mind, bidding farewell to those that were about him, and telling them he was going to sleep."

LUCILIO VANINI.

Lucilio Vanini was born at Taurisano, near Naples, in 1584 or 1585. He studied theology, philosophy, physics, astronomy, medicine, and civil and ecclesiastical law. At Padua he became a doctor of canon and civil law, and was ordained a priest. Resolving to visit the academies of Europe, he travelled through France, England, Holland and Germany. According to Fathers Mersenne and Garasse, he formed a project of promulgating Atheism over the whole of Europe. The same priests allege that he had fifty thousand Atheistic followers at Paris! One of his books was condemned to the flames by the Sorbonne. Vanini himself met eventually with the same fate. Tried at Toulouse for heresy, he was condemned as an Atheist, and sentenced to the stake. At the trial he protested his belief in God, and defended the existence of Deity with the flimsiest arguments; so flimsy, indeed, that one can scarcely read them, without suspecting that he

was pouring irony on his judges. They ordered him to have his tongue cut out before being burnt alive. It is said that he afterwards confessed, took the communion, and declared himself ready to subscribe the tenets of the Church.

But if he did so, he certainly recovered his natural dignity when he had to face the worst. *Le Mercure Français,* which cannot be suspected of partiality towards him, reports that " he died with as much constancy, patience, and fortitude as any other man ever seen; for setting forth from the Conciergerie joyful and elate, he pronounced in Italian these words: ' Come, let us die cheerfully like a philosopher !' "

There is a report that, on seeing the pile, he cried out, " Ah, my God !" On which a bystander said, " You believe in God, then." " No," he retorted, " it's a mere phrase." Father Garasse says that he uttered many other notable blasphemies, refused to ask forgiveness of God, or of the King, and died furious and defiant. So obstinate was he, that pincers had to be employed to pluck out his tongue. President Gramond, author of the *History of France Under Louis XIII.,* writes: " I saw him in the tumbril as they led him to execution, mocking the Cordelier who had been sent to exhort him to repentance, and insulting our Saviour by these impious words, ' He sweated with fear and weakness, and I, I die undaunted.' "

Vanini's martyrdom took place at Toulouse on February 19, 1619. He was only thirty-four, an age, Camile Desmoulins said, " fatal to revolutionists."

(The reader may consult M.X. Rousselot's *Œuvres Philosophiques de Vanini,* avec une Notice sur sa Vie et ses Ouvrages. Paris, 1842).

VOLNEY.

CONSTANTINE FRANCOIS DE CHASSEBŒUF, known in literature by the name of Volney, and the author of the famous *Ruins of Empires,* was born in 1757. He was a great traveller, and his visits to Oriental countries were described so graphically and philosophically, that Gibbon wished he might go over the whole world and record his experiences for the delight and edification of mankind. His Atheism was always unconcealed, and in his famous *Ruins* he always exhibits theology and priestcraft as the constant enemies of civilization. His sceptical *History of Samuel,* which is sometimes wrongly ascribed to Voltaire, was written within a year of his death.

A very foolish story about Volney's " cowardice " in a storm is still circulated in pious tracts. It is said that he threw himself on the deck of the vessel, crying in agony, " Oh, my God, my God!" " There is a God, then, Monsieur Volney?" said one of the passengers. " Oh, yes," he exclaimed. "There is, there is, Lord save me!" When the vessel arrived safely in port, goes the story, he " returned to his atheistical sentiments."

This nonsense probably originated in the *Tract Magazine,* for July, 1832, where it appears very much amplified, and in many respects different. It appears in a still different form in the eighth volume of the *Evangelical Magazine.* Beyond that it is lost in the obscurity which always surrounds the birth of these edifying fictions.

Volney died at Paris on April 25, 1820, leaving a large part of his fortune to be spent on prize essays on the subject of language. Adolphe Bossange, in a notice of the life and writings of Volney, prefixed to

the 1838 (Paris) edition of his works, gives the following account of his last hours :—

> His health, which had always been delicate, became languid, and soon he felt his end was approaching. It was worthy of his life.
>
> "I know the custom of your profession," he said to the doctor three days before he died; "but I wish you not to play on my imagination like that of other patients. I do not fear death. Tell me frankly what you think of my condition, for I have arrangements to make." The doctor seemed to hesitate. "I know enough," said Volney, "let them bring a notary."
>
> He dictated his will with the utmost calmness; and not abandoning at the last moment the idea which had never ceased to occupy his mind during twenty-five years, and doubtless fearing that his labours would be brought to a cessation by his death, he devoted the sum of 24,000 francs to founding an annual prize for the best essay on the philosophical study of languages.

Volney's death in the principles which guided his laborious and useful life was so notorious that the Abbé Migne, in his great Catholic Dictionary, says, "It appears that in his last moments he refused the consolations of religion." [76]

VOLTAIRE.

FRANCOIS MARIE AROUET, generally known by the name of Voltaire, was born at Chatenay, on February 20, 1694. He died in Paris, on May 30, 1778. To write his life during those eighty-three years would be to give the intellectual history of Europe.

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[76] *Dictionnaire de Biographie Chrétienne et Anti-Chrétienne.*

While Voltaire was living at Ferney in 1768, he gave a curious exhibition of that profane sportiveness which was a strong element in his character. On Easter Sunday he took his Secretary Wagnière with him to commune at the village church, and also "to lecture a little those scoundrels who steal continually." Apprised of Voltaire's sermon on theft, the Bishop of Anneci rebuked him, and finally "forbade every curate, priest, and monk of his diocese to confess, absolve or give the communion to the seigneur of Ferney, without his express orders, under pain of interdiction." With a wicked light in his eyes, Voltaire said he would commune in spite of the Bishop; nay, that the ceremony should be gone through in his chamber. Then ensued an exquisite comedy, which shakes one's sides even as described by the stolid Wagnière. Feigning a deadly sickness, Voltaire took to his bed. The surgeon, who found his pulse was excellent, was bamboozled into certifying that he was in danger of death. Then the priest was summoned to administer the last consolation. The poor devil at first objected, but Voltaire threatened him with legal proceedings for refusing to bring the sacrament to a dying man, who had never been excommunicated. This was accompanied with a grave declaration that M. de Voltaire "had never ceased to respect and to practise the Catholic religion." Eventually the priest came "half dead with fear." Voltaire demanded absolution at once, but the Capuchin pulled out of his pocket a profession of faith, drawn up by the Bishop, which Voltaire was required to sign. Then the comedy deepened. Voltaire kept demanding absolution, and the distracted priest kept presenting the document for his signature. At last the Lord of Ferney had his way. The priest gave him the wafer, and Voltaire declared, "Having God in my mouth,"

that he forgave his enemies. Directly he left the room, Voltaire leapt briskly out of bed, where a minute before he seemed unable to move. "I have had a little trouble," he said to Wagnière, "with this comical genius of a Capuchin; but that was only for amusement, and to accomplish a good purpose. Let us take a turn in the garden. I told you I would be confessed and commune in my bed, in spite of M. Biord." [77]

Voltaire treated Christianity so lightly that he confessed and took the sacrament for a joke. Is it wonderful if he did the same thing on his death-bed to secure the decent burial of his corpse? He remembered his own bitter sorrow and indignation, which he expressed in burning verse, when the remains of poor Adrienne Lecouvreur were refused sepulture because she died outside the pale of the Church. Fearing similar treatment himself, he arranged to cheat the Church again. By the agency of his nephew, the Abbé Mignot, the Abbé Gautier was brought to his bedside, and according to Condorcet he "confessed Voltaire, receiving from him a profession of faith, by which he declared that he died in the Catholic religion, wherein he was born." [78] This story is generally credited, but its truth is by no means indisputable; for in the Abbé Gautier's declaration to the Prior of the Abbey of Scellières, where Voltaire's remains were interred, he says that when he visited M. de Voltaire, he found him "unfit to be confessed."

The curate of St. Sulpice was annoyed at being forestalled by the Abbé Gautier, and as Voltaire was his parishioner, he demanded "a detailed profession of

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[77] Parton's *Life of Voltaire*, Vol. II., pp. 410-415.

[78] Condorcet's *Vie de Voltaire*, p. 144.

faith and a disavowal of all heretical doctrines." He paid the dying Freethinker many unwelcome visits, in the vain hope of obtaining a full recantation, which would be a fine feather in his hat. The last of these visits is thus described by Wagnière, who was an eye-witness to the scene. We take Carlyle's translation :—

> Two days before that mournful death, M. l'Abbé Mignot, his nephew, went to seek the Curé of St. Sulpice and the Abbé Gautier, and brought them into his uncle's sick room; who, on being informed that the Abbé Gautier was there, "Ah, well!" said he, "give him my compliments and my thanks." The Abbé spoke some words to him, exhorting him to patience. The Curé of St. Sulpice then came forward, having announced himself, and asked of M. de Voltaire, elevating his voice, if he acknowledged the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ? The sick man pushed one of his hands against the Curé's calotte (coif), shoving him back, and cried, turning abruptly to the other side, "Let me die in peace (Laissez-moi mourir en paix)." The Curé seemingly considered his person soiled, and his coif dishonoured, by the touch of the philosopher. He made the sick-nurse give him a little brushing, and then went out with the Abbé Gautier.[79]

A further proof that Voltaire made no real recantation lies in the fact that the Bishop of Troyes sent a peremptory dispatch to the Prior of Scellières, which lay in his diocese, forbidding him to inter the heretic's remains. The dispatch, however, arrived too late, and Voltaire's ashes remained there until 1791, when they were removed to Paris and placed in the Pantheon, by order of the National Assembly.

Voltaire's last moments are described by Wagnière.

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[79] Carlyle's *Essays*, Vol. II. (People's Edition), p. 161.

We again take Carlyle's translation :—

> He expired about a quarter past eleven at night, with the most perfect tranquillity, after having suffered the cruelest pains in consequence of those fatal drugs, which his own imprudence, and especially that of the persons who should have looked to it, made him swallow. Ten minutes before his last breath he took the hand of Morand, his valet-de-chambre, who was watching him; pressed it, and said, "*Adieu, mon cher Morand, je me meurs*—Adieu, my dear Morand, I am gone." These are the last words uttered by M. de Voltaire.[80]

Such are the facts of Voltaire's decease. He made no recantation, he refused to utter or sign a confession of faith, but with the connivance of his nephew, the Abbé Mignot, he tricked the Church into granting him a decent burial, not choosing to be flung into a ditch or buried like a dog. His heresy was never seriously questioned at the time, and the clergy actually clamoured for the expulsion of the Prior, who had allowed his body to be interred in a church vault.[81]

Many years afterwards the priests pretended that Voltaire died raving. They declared that Marshal Richelieu was horrified by the scene and obliged to leave the chamber. From France the pious concoction spread to England, until it was exposed by Sir Charles Morgan, who published the following extracts from a letter by Dr. Burard, who, as assistant physician, was constantly about Voltaire in his last moments :—

> I feel happy in being able, while paying homage to truth, to destroy the effects of the lying stories which have been told respecting the last moments of

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[80] Carlyle, Vol. II., p. 160.

[81] Parton, Vol. II., p. 165.

Mons. de Voltaire. I was, by office, one of those who were appointed to watch the whole progress of his illness, with M.M. Tronchin, Lorry, and Try, his medical attendants. I never left him for an instant during his last moments, and I can certify that we invariably observed in him the same strength of character, though his disease was necessarily attended with horrible pain. (Here follow the details of his case.) We positively forbade him to speak in order to prevent the increase of a spitting of blood, with which he was attacked; still he continued to communicate with us by means of little cards, on which he wrote his questions; we replied to him verbally, and if he was not satisfied, he always made his observations to us in writing. He therefore retained his faculties up to the last moment, and the fooleries which have been attributed to him are deserving of the greatest contempt. It could not even be said that such or such person had related any circumstance of his death as being witness to it; for at the last, admission to his chamber was forbidden to any person. Those who came to obtain intelligence respecting the patient, waited in the saloon, and other apartments at hand. The proposition, therefore, which has been put in the mouth of Marshal Richelieu is as unfounded as the rest.

Paris, *April* 3, 1819. (Signed) BURARD.[82]

Another slander appears to emanate from the Abbé Barruel, who was so well informed about Voltaire that he calls him "the dying Atheist," when, as all the world knows, he was a Deist.

In his last illness he sent for Dr. Tronchin. When the Doctor came, he found Voltaire in the greatest agony, exclaiming with the utmost horror—"I am abandoned by God and man." He then said, "Doctor, I will give you half of what I am worth, if you will give me six months' life." The doctor an-

[82] *Philosophy of Morals*, by Sir Charles Morgan.

swered, "Sir, you cannot live six weeks." Voltaire replied, "Then I shall go to hell, and you will go with me!" and soon after expired.

When the clergy are reduced to manufacture such contemptible rubbish as this, they must indeed be in great straits. It is flatly contradicted by the evidence of every contemporary of Voltaire.

Our readers will, we think, be fully satisfied that Voltaire neither recanted nor died raving, but remained a sceptic to the last; passing away quietly, at a ripe old age, to the "undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns," and leaving behind him a name that brightens the tracks of time.

JAMES WATSON.

JAMES WATSON was one of the bravest heroes in the struggle for a free press. He was one of Richard Carlile's shopmen, and took his share of imprisonment when the Government tried to suppress Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* and several other Freethought publications. In fighting for the unstamped press, he was again imprisoned in 1833. As a publisher he was notorious for his editions of Paine, Mirabaud, Volney, Shelley, and Owen. He died on November 29, 1874, aged seventy-five, "passing away in his sleep, without a struggle, without a sigh." [83]

JOHN WATTS.

JOHN WATTS was at one time sub-editor of the *Reasoner*, and afterwards, for an interval, editor of the *National Reformer*. He was the author of several publications, including *Half Hours with Freethinkers*

[83] *James Watson* by W. J. Linton, p. 86.

in collaboration with Charles Bradlaugh. His death took place on October 31, 1866, and the following account of it was written by Dr. George Sexton and published in the *National Reformer* of the following week :—

> At about half past seven in the evening he breathed his last, so gently that although I had one of his hands in mine, and his brother the other in his, the moment of his death passed almost unobserved by either of us. No groan, no sigh, no pang indicated his departure. He died as a candle goes out when burned to the socket.

George Sexton afterwards turned Christian, at least by profession; but, after what he had written of the last moments of John Watts, he could scarcely pretend that unbelievers have any fear of death.

WOOLSTON.

THOMAS WOOLSTON was born at Northampton in 1669, and he died in London in 1733. He was educated at Sidney College, Cambridge, taking his M.A. degree, and being elected a fellow. Afterwards he was deprived of his fellowship for heresy. Entering into holy orders, he closely studied divinity, and gained a reputation for scholarship, as well as for sobriety and benevolence. His profound knowledge of ecclesiastical history gave him a contempt for the Fathers, in attacking whom he reflected on the modern clergy. He maintained that miracles were incredible, and that all the supernatural stories of the New Testament must be regarded as figurative. For this he was prosecuted on a charge of blasphemy and profaneness,

but the action dropped through the honourable intervention of Whiston. Subsequently he published *Six Discourses on Miracles,* which were dedicated to six bishops. In these the Church was assailed in homely language, and her doctrines were mercilessly ridiculed. Thirty thousand copies are said to have been sold. A fresh prosecution for blasphemy was commenced, the Attorney-General declaring the *Discourses* to be "the most blasphemous book that ever was published in any age whatever." Woolston ably defended himself, but he was found guilty, and sentenced to one year's imprisonment and a fine of £100. Being too poor to pay the fine Christian charity detained him permanently in the King's Bench Prison. With a noble courage he refused to purchase his release by promising to refrain from promulgating his views, and prison fever at length released him from his misery. The following account of his last moments is taken from the *Daily Courant* of Monday, January 29, 1733:—

> On Saturday night, about nine o'clock, died Mr. Woolston, author of the *Discourses on our Saviour's Miracles,* in the sixty-sixth year of his age. About five minutes before he died he uttered these words: "This is a struggle which all men must go through, and which I bear not only with patience but willingness." Upon which he closed his eyes, and shut his lips, with a seeming design to compose his face with decency, without the help of a friend's hand, and then he expired.

Without the help of a friend's hand! Helpless and friendless, pent in a prison cell, the brave old man faced Death in solitary grandeur, yielding, for the first and last time, to the Lord of all.

PART II

CHAPTER I.

How the Ancients Viewed Death.

The remarks which follow have reference only to historical religions antedating Christianity, and are intended to emphasize the contrast between Pagan and Christian ideas of death. In studying the conceptions of the future life held by the ancients we must bear in mind that the same views did not persist throughout the history of any given people. Sometimes outside influences caused a change in the prevailing notions of death and the future state, sometimes doctrines seemed to gain a new lease of life after having been long on the wane, and, above all, there is nearly always traceable, as soon as a certain stage of culture is reached, a marked difference between the conceptions of the cultivated classes and those of the common people.

Egypt is probably, though not certainly, the original home of agriculture and of the most ancient civilization. The materials for the study of its religion, and especially of its funeral ritual, are not only the oldest extant, but are abundant and of varied character. The collection of spells or charms known to us as The Book of the Dead, but called by the Egyptians themselves the book of the " coming forth

in the day-time," goes back to a remote antiquity, and the Pyramid Texts and the records brought to light by many excavations are much older. What impresses the student of these sources is the central importance of the doctrine of a future life in the Egyptian religion of historic times. We do not know of any other ancient people that made the same elaborate efforts to attend to their dead and to secure their welfare in the next world. The preparation of his tomb and the recording thereon of the chief incidents of his life in this world began with the Egyptian's first sense of responsibility to himself and his family. It was the duty of his successors to depict on the walls of the tomb his employments in the other world. Here, as everywhere else, ideas concerning the abode of the dead underwent an evolution. At first this abode seems to have been a kind of shadow-world that could hardly be described as attractive. When a paradise for the worthy " souls " first appeared it was supposed to be situated in one of the most fertile spots of the Nile delta, but later it was transferred to the Milky Way, and this follows the usual lines of development to astral immortality in other religious systems.

Originally there were many local divinities and cults, and they never became completely fused into a consistent system. In the course of time, however, Osiris, the local deity of Abydos and Busiris, acquired a solar character. He gave the Egyptians laws, introduced agriculture, and later travelled over the earth as an apostle of civilization, " making little use of armed force, but winning the hearts of men for the most part by persuasion and teaching." He was essentially a saviour-god and the Greeks identified him with their Dionysos. His death and resuscitation, whereby he becomes the judge of the dead, with power to award eternal life or condemn to the lake of fire, is

the pivot on which revolves nearly everything that really matters in the ancient Egyptian mythology.

Three elements entered into the nature of man, according to the Egyptian system—the corruptible body, the *ba,* usually interpreted to mean the " living soul," and the *ka,* the spiritual double or divine counter-part of the deceased. The New Testament ideas of body, soul and spirit correspond fairly closely with this division. In the age of the pyramids the preservation of the body by embalming was considered the first duty of the survivors, probably because the idea of a physical resurrection had now become definitely established, and the complete body was considered necessary for deceased's happiness in the next world.

On various grounds the Egyptian religion has been described by some Christian writers as " the least spiritual " in the world. The criticism is one-sided. The idea of the efficacy of magic is prominent in the Egyptian system; the future life is represented as a replica of the present; and the features of a primitive animal worship persisted down to a late period. Nevertheless, under Amenhotep IV. (about 1375 B.C.) we find developed an " inspiring universalism " in religion, with lofty conceptions of one deity, God no longer of the Nile Valley only, but of all men everywhere. In the judgment of souls before Osiris the emphasis is on the candidate's moral conduct, not on the observance of ritual acts or the faithful acceptance of doctrine. In the Book of the Dead, of the forty-two crimes enumerated to which the deceased had to plead " not guilty," there is nothing directly or indirectly associated with the idea of intellectual doubt. Even for those finally condemned at the " last judgment " the torments were not eternal.

In their conception of the destiny of mankind after

death the Babylonians and Assyrians stood in marked contrast with the Egyptians. The future life did not occupy a prominent place in the beliefs of the people. Despite the exceptional influence of astrology in the Babylonian system, there is no evidence that the spirits of departed men ever had a celestial home, or that the doctrine of future rewards and punishments was ever evolved by the hierarchy, the favour of the gods being usually manifested by prosperity in this world. The main interest of the Babylonian mythology to us is its close affinity to the early Hebrew views concerning the creation of the world, the "soul," the nether world and the lot of the dead. Nearly all the popular legends and superstitions of the Hebrews on these subjects may be traced to the ideas current among the Babylonians.

The early religion of Yahweh was concerned primarily with the continued existence of the nation, and assigned no definite future life to the individual, whose idea of " soul " followed the same lines of ancestor-worship as can be traced more clearly in the religion of early Rome. The Hebrew Sheol, like Homer's Hades, was the abode of both the righteous and the wicked, and there they led a shadowy life, which, however, reflected the realities of the upper world much more faintly than Hades did. No amount of ingenuity can read into such texts as Ecclesiastes iii. and ix. anything but the idea of complete extinction for the individual. No idea of retribution was associated with Sheol. But during the century and a half immediately preceding the Christian era the Jews elaborated, mainly from Persian sources, a theology of the future world, with all the recognized machinery of heaven and hell, angels and spirits, to which the Christian system has accustomed us, and particularly of hell with its fire, demons and varied torments. Des-

pite all disclaimers on the part of liberal Christians of the twentieth century, some of the details of this grotesque mythology have found their way into our Synoptic Gospels. In the Book of Revelation they appear in a more crude form, giving prominence to the last judgment, the millennium, and the personal activities of Satan.

It is not correct to say that the Greek religious world " germinated out of itself," but it preserved certain peculiar features till the decay of Paganism. Sacrifices and libations to the dead must have existed in very early times since excavations at Mycenæ and other places show them to have prevailed long before the Homeric age. In Homer, however, only slight indications are found of offerings to the dead. His underworld is a land of shades presided over by Hades, and under this again is Tartarus, the prison of the rebellious Titans, and in later classical mythology a place for the wicked in general, corresponding to the " abyss " of apocalyptic literature. In Homer death was by no means welcomed, for the Greeks were accustomed to quite a joyous life on earth and the underworld had nothing similar to offer them. The frequent references in the great Athenian writers, especially in the dramatists, to the dead and the offering of sacrifice, show that these ideas had acquired a great vogue at some period and contrast noticeably with the paucity of such references in Homer. The difference may be due to migration or to the adoption of a different method of disposing of the dead.

In Greek literature it is always necessary to consider how far the poet or philosopher is simply utilizing mythological material for art purposes or as a text for pure speculation. Plato was seriously interested in the question of the soul and its survival of death, but as a philosopher, not as a theologian. In his day

there was little real belief in immortality among the educated Athenians, and many of the inscriptions on tombs show that doubters among the "common people" were far from few. To meet with a widespread and dominant desire for "eternal life," we have to wait till the Orphic and other mysteries, with rites of initiation and baptism, of purification from guilt, and the religious sects associated with them, became influential shortly before the Roman period. The rites and worship of Dionysos were important features of Orphism, and Hades became divided into two apartments, the Elysian Fields for the initiated and Tartarus for the wicked. The beliefs of the mysteries and the very phrases used in them are reflected noticeably in some of Paul's Epistles.

The Romans had no mythology except what, towards the end of the Republic, they borrowed from the Greeks and naturalized, sometimes under protest from Cato and other typical Romans of the old school. Their early religion shows the essential features of ancestor worship, the "piety" that centred round hearth and home, and the importance of the family as the unit of the communal life. Of "gods" in the proper sense of the word, those that were indigenous supervised agricultural processes, Jupiter dominating all the rest. At an early date new elements became incorporated into the ancient system, but it was not till the extension of Roman sway over the Mediterranean and the East that foreign influences, especially Greek, Egyptian and Syrian, made serious inroads on the old national religion. These inroads continued for a long period and their effects form part of the early history of Roman Christianity. Towards the end of the Republic the educated Roman had little real religion and his hold on belief in a future life was slight; but the passionate protests of the poet Lucre-

tius against the fear of death, and of gods that were concerned with the life or lot of men, indicate that the old superstitions still had some influence on the mass of the people. But the popular and the philosophic ideas of the other world, long current among the Greeks and the Romans, find full expression in Virgil's poetry. At one time the Roman Tartarus must have been a very real place for the populace, but the fear of it never dominated life as the Christian hell has done. Future punishment was inflicted for offences against the moral law, not for unbelief, and there was no vindictiveness in the idea of a Tartarus reserved for the wicked. Neglect of the traditional religious rites was a species of disloyalty to the State. But in the poets and statesmen of the Augustan age and the early years of the Empire we find, in regard to belief in a future life, either outspoken denial or a firmly agnostic attitude. Catullus, in oft quoted lines, perhaps expresses the real view of the majority of cultivated Romans of his time:—

> Suns may set and suns may rise,
> But we, when once our brief light dies,
> In one long night must close our eyes.

In his beautiful little treatise *On Old Age,* Cicero says that at the most the survival of the soul after death is only a probability. He adds, and the same idea is found elsewhere in his writings, that whether extinction or survival awaits him, he views either alternative without fear. He speaks of death as "the cessation of toil and release from distress," and this represents the attitude of a large proportion of Stoics and all Epicureans. In a letter to Servius Sulpicius, however, he denied the survival of consciousness after death and says we ought not to desire it. Lucretius and Pliny not only reject the idea of continued existence, but welcome death as the end of all things

for the individual. Tacitus, writing of Agricola, his father-in-law, hoped that his character would live in men's memory. Those Romans who still needed a religion that assured them an immortal life had to import one, and on the establishment of the Empire the State did not discourage such importations unless they clashed with Emperor-worship. There was a wide choice of religions available, all offering " the crown of life " as the reward of initiation and the acceptance of certain doctrines. " The Orontes has flowed into the Tiber," wrote Juvenal, the satiric poet. It is as significant as it is true, for at Antioch the Orontes was then used as a great sewer.

CHAPTER II.

The Christian View of Death.

When we pass from the Greek and Roman attitude to death in the most cultured period of classical antiquity, and study Christian conceptions of the "last things," and the hopes and fears associated with them, from the early expectation of the approaching advent of "a new heaven and a new earth," down to the stories of infidel death-beds in our own time, we enter a different world of ideas and ideals. No one perhaps has expressed this contrast more vigorously than Lecky:—

> Death in itself was made incomparably more terrible by the notion that it was not a law but a punishment; that sufferings inconceivably greater than those of Earth awaited the great masses of the human race beyond the grave; that an event which was believed to have taken place ages before we were born, or small frailties such as the best of us cannot escape, were sufficient to bring men under this condemnation; that the only paths to safety were to be found in ecclesiastical ceremonies; in the assistance of priests; in an accurate choice between competing theological doctrines. At the same time the largest and most powerful of the Churches of Christendom has, during many centuries, done its utmost to in-

tensify the natural fear of death by associating it with loathsome and appalling surroundings. (*The Map of Life*, pp. 321-2.)

Though Christianity has been the most exclusive and intolerant of all the great religious systems, every item of its theology has been borrowed. "With regard to the belief in heaven, in the immortality of the soul, in the reunion of the dead, and in a future retribution, the Pagan world differed from the Christian in nothing save in the grounds for such beliefs." (J. A. Farrer, *Paganism and Christianity*, p. 108). The Christian heaven, as far as the New Testament affords any idea of it, combines the two inconsistent views, that God was to establish his Kingdom over men on earth, and that the place of future bliss existed in the skies. The latter, with all the fantastic embellishments of apocalyptic literature—a great white throne, gold, jewels, harps—was destined to become the traditional notion; but it is far from attractive to educated Protestants of the twentieth century, who have discovered that heaven is not a place at all but a state of mind. This traditional notion was essentially Oriental, carrying us back to the geocentric theory of astronomy, with a solid sky above and dark depths below it. For the modern man astronomy and geology have completely discredited the New Testament idea of a definitely located heaven and hell.

The conception of a celestial immortality is not primitive. It was at first closely associated with the rising and setting of suns and stars, imagined as quite near to the earth, and afterwards with the idea of a physical resurrection. This crude and repellent idea is prominent in the religion of Zoroaster, from which the Jews took it over, and the Parsees still believe in it. It gives scope for vivid representation of the punishment to follow death. It is hardly neces-

sary to say here that the New Testament stories of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are hopelessly contradictory and are probably late additions to the original versions. Their main features follow the mythical accounts of the resurrection and ascension of the other Saviour-gods.

Christian theology has also been influenced by Platonic speculation in regard to the immortality of the soul; but the conception of the survival of a purely spiritual entity, the "soul," is radically different from that of a bodily resurrection, and may have been influenced by different methods of disposing of the dead. Christianity has adopted the more gross and repugnant of the two views, and that is why Roman Catholics and many Protestants vehemently oppose cremation.

Roman Catholics and Protestants alike affect to contrast Christian hope with the dismal prospect of the Secularist; but the corner-stone of their theology, in regard to death and the next world, has always been, except for the early martyrs and enthusiasts, the fear of future punishment rather than the expectation of future bliss. In all religions we find fanatical adherents willing to face death and even to seek the occasion for it, and Church historians assign special honours to some of the early Christians as martyrs for the faith. We may doubt whether these Christians represent the highest type of martyrdom. "However much we may admire the Christian martyrs," says Sir John Seeley, "yet how can we compare their self-devotion with that of the Spartan three hundred or the Roman Decius? Those heroes surrendered *all,* and looked forward to nothing but the joyless asphodel meadow or 'drear Cocytus with its languid stream.' But the Christian martyr might well die

with exultation, for what he lost was poor compared with that which he hoped instantly to gain." (*Ecce Homo,* p. 99.)

In cultivating the fear of death Christianity stands apart, in a class by itself among the great religions of the world. The prominence of an eternal hell in the Christian theology, the hymns containing graphic details of its victims' agonies, the pictorial representations of the tortured in works of high art, have been dealt with so often that they need only be mentioned here. But the anticipated felicity of contemplating the anguish of the unredeemed, associated with Christian saints for centuries, throws a unique light on the spirit of the religion of Christ and Paul.

Belief in purgatory was formally declared by the Council of Trent to be a matter of Catholic faith. Whether the ancient Egyptians believed in an intermediate state of purification or not has been the subject of considerable dispute; but there seems to be no doubt that they believed in the efficacy of prayers for the dead. The idea of temporal punishment, pending purgation from all taint and guilt, is clearly traceable in Plato and in Virgil. In the second book of the *Republic* Plato says that astrologers and hypocrites travelled about the country, pretending that their offerings and expiations delivered the souls of the dead enduring the penalties of their crimes. Plato died in 347 B.C. It is interesting to turn from his soul-saving fraternity to an advertisement of the Association of the Crusade of Prayer for the souls of Purgatory, in *The Tablet* of November 7, 1931. This Association was established, with the Pope's blessing, in 1892. The Roman Catholics, however, rightly maintain that prayers for the dead were common among Christians at an early period. The Reformers rejected the doctrine with great determination; but there have been

ever since intermittent discussions as to whether it is Scriptural or not. In the Anglican Church there is now a strong tendency to restore it and even in some of the other Protestant bodies to accept it in a revised form.

There is little justification for singling out the Roman Catholic Church for special condemnation for intensifying the fear of death, except in so far as she made a lucrative traffic of purgatory. It is true that throughout the Middle Ages Death was a grim figure persistently dogging the footsteps of men and women. It is also true that Roman Catholics still adhere literally to the view that death is the result of sin and to the belief in a material eternal hell, views held to-day by few educated Protestants; but there is no room for doubt as to which of the two bodies represents the orthodox faith. Hell-fire and Satan are still very important weapons in the equipment of the Salvation Army. No doubt a large proportion of the Roman Catholic population of Europe is dominated by abject fear of death; but here we meet with that " flock " of men and women on a low level of culture to whom orthodox Christianity has always appealed, and the ecclesiastical organization, in possession of the one and only key to salvation, has been able to quarantine the faithful from the influence of modern humanism. We have only to read, in the literature of the period, the story of the Methodist Revival in England, and to note the grim emphasis on the reality of hell, in order to see what part the fear of death and the future played in Wesley's success. Relying on the authority of the Bible, the Protestant sects gave a special vitality to such doctrines as original sin, predestination, election and grace, and justification by faith, and heightened the awfulness of the curse of inherited guilt. James Cotter Morison said that these doctrines,

as enunciated by Paul, had probably " added more to human misery than any other utterances made by man." J. A. Froude also expressed his abhorrence of the idea of predestination. Man was doomed, he says, " unless exempted by special grace," to live in sin on earth and to be eternally miserable when he left it. Lecky declared that Jonathan Edwards's *Original Sin* is " one of the most detestable books that have ever issued from the pen of man." Even to-day among a large proportion of " liberal " Protestants the repudiation of an eternal hell is not referred to any standard of human ethics but to the interpretation of some word or passage in the New Testament. For various reasons which cannot be discussed here, one tendency of the Reformation was to concentrate more attention and energy on worldly matters; but it was the Renaissance that first stimulated the criticism of religious authority, and pointed the way to modern humanism.

The whole Christian conception of man, his origin and his destiny, is inseparably connected with the Genesis account of the Creation and the Fall, which the organized Church, Catholic or Protestant, long fought to maintain at all costs. But this is by no means the whole explanation of Christian doctrine concerning a future life. The New Testament not only endorses in the most emphatic terms the false dogma that man fell from a primitive state of innocence, but it is steeped in the superstitious beliefs taken over from the Persians and from the mysteries or the Orphic rites which were closely allied to them.

That the Christian scheme of redemption, the fusion of these two sets of doctrine, should have been transmitted with so little protest from generation to generation for more than a thousand years, is one of the arresting facts in the intellectual history of Europe.

If the cultivated Greek could rise " lightly from the banquet of life to pass into that unknown land with whose destiny speculation had but dallied," and the Roman could lie down " almost as lightly to rest after his course of public duty," how did the new religion effect so complete and enduring a transformation in man's attitude to death and a future life? The reasons are not so recondite as they seem. The Christians took over the Jewish scriptures which gave a very definite account of the origin of the world and man, and ready-made " explanations " of much that had previously been matter of vague speculation, and the Jewish Messiah became identified with one of the many Saviour-gods of the Eastern Mediterranean. Various influences, in particular the growth of the idea of Imperialism as a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great, and later the extension of Roman sway over the civilized world, had prepared the way for an age of universalism, and this applied to the religious as well as to the political life. The old local cults were in a state bordering on disintegration in the cities, but might be fused with the new " revelation " into one great world-religion. For its complete triumph Christianity had to wait several centuries during which it surmounted strong opposition. Nevertheless, when it did triumph the organization of the Roman Empire brought the irresistible factor of its statecraft to aid in welding the "gospel of salvation" into the most thorough-going supernaturalism that has ever existed, and Rome's legal system, her wealth and prestige, were applied to the cultural enslavement of Europe as no similar forces had ever been applied before. In a few centuries the " one true faith " succeeded in petrifying the heart of a Continent, for all the necessary conditions were present, first in the Christian scheme of salvation itself, and secondly in

the political and social life of the Empire. The fear of death became a carefully tended "segregated survival." It is as easy to cultivate the mental as the material soil to produce a given crop. Until our own day the views that man was a fallen creature, that hell was a real place and that there was only one road of escape from it, were as true for the philosopher as for the peasant. The tomb was man's earliest temple and for centuries remained the greatest of all his institutions. It is still the greatest institution in Christendom.

CHAPTER III.

The Freethinker's Attitude to Death.

In Protestant quarters the wide-spread change of tone towards belief in a material hell is part of the humanitarian revolt against dogmas that once passed without challenge and were amply supported by biblical texts. But it is not only in regard to hell that modernism has made serious inroads on the traditional views of the next world. Canon Streeter tells us that the old conceptions of heaven and hell, quite definite enough for the early or the medieval Church, are now "intellectually discredited, even at the level of education which the Elementary School has made universal." The other world is sensibly decreasing in popularity, so much so that it is frequently urged that the Protestant pulpit is losing its power because the old note of conviction in regard to sin, judgment and future retribution is absent from the sermon of to-day. This indifference to the future life, it must not be forgotten, has asserted itself despite all that has been done to foster the belief by a powerful hierarchy, by control of the child, and by the official support of the State. The complaints of the "fundamentalists" are wide-spread and completely refute the absurd plea of an innate desire for immortality. In spite of the vogue of

Spiritualism, this change of tone in regard to the hereafter has taken place side by side with an entirely changed attitude to the present world and to merely temporary happiness. It is reflected in the general literature of the day, and is the most significant of all comments on the stories once circulated about infidel death-beds. No stronger confirmation could be required for the statement of Dr. Woods Hutchinson, that "one of the principal consolations of religion consists in allaying the fear which it has itself conjured up."

Those who have had concrete experience of men and women shortly before death bear almost unanimous testimony to their calm and resignation. Sir Henry Halford, one of the leading physicians of the nineteenth century, says:—

> Of the great number of those to whom it has been my painful professional duty to have administered in the last hours of their lives, I have sometimes felt surprised that so few have appeared reluctant to go "to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns."

Similar testimony is given by Sir William Osler, Dr. Robert Mackenna and other medical practitioners of high eminence. Robert C. Adams, the son of the Rev. Dr. Nehemiah Adams, thus contrasts the death-bed of the "infidel" with that of the Christian:—

> An intelligent physician states that he has witnessed more fear of death and more distress upon the death-bed among Christians than among unbelievers. He says he has never witnessed a painful death of an unbeliever. (*Travels in Faith from Tradition to Reason*, 1884, p. 186.)

All this accords perfectly well with what has usually been the average Freethinker's attitude to death. But to-day he dismisses the "consolations" of re-

ligion as less reputable than ever. The study of Comparative Religion has deprived Christianity of every unique claim once made for it, and " spirit " and " soul " are traced to their origin in the beliefs of the primitive savage. At the same time evolution has shown that man is an animal amongst animals, subject to the same laws of birth and growth, and that there is no more mystery about his death than there is about the death of a chimpanzee. Dr. J. Y. Simpson, Professor of Natural Science in New College, Edinburgh, emphasizes strongly the difficulties of accepting evolution and maintaining " an inherent immortality for man " (*Man and the Attainment of Immortality*, p. 232). And apart from considerations based upon science the Freethinker is apt to notice that each system or creed spurns nearly every other's speculations on the subject as mere guesses or degrading superstitions. He sees that in a large part of Protestant Christendom heaven and hell are neither openly rejected nor actively disbelieved, they are just survivals that have no practical influence on life.

But with more direct bearing on the present-day attitude of most cultivated men to life and death, Freethinkers feel that if we could now receive the same " assurance " of immortality, and on the same terms, as obtained only a century ago, it would deprive life of its highest values. Death is an indispensable factor in the moral world. The sense of personal loss when our relatives and friends die in the prime of life is natural enough, but there is nothing in this corresponding to an artificially fostered desire for survival. Professor Albert Ladenburg, in 1903, at a meeting of the Association of German Scientists and Physicians, said that he did " not know of a single scientifically proved fact to which we can appeal in support of the belief in immortality," and that those who hold to it

do so because they have not examined the grounds of their belief. He quoted the opinion of Wundt, the eminent psychologist, that personal immortality is inconsistent with "psychic investigation," and that it would be well if we regarded it "as an intolerable fate."

CHAPTER IV.

Some Christian Death-Beds.

Introductory Note. In the fierce duels between Roman Catholics and Protestants we find in evidence the same mendacities as both have circulated in regard to Freethinkers. A pamphlet entitled *The Dying Pillow*, compiled by the Rev. W. Wileman, which ran through twelve editions, presents a number of prominent Roman Catholics in the same category as Voltaire and other " infidels " in their " terror-stricken" anticipation of death. Roman Catholics retort by recounting the last Days of Luther and constrasting the death-bed of Mary Queen of Scots with Elizabeth's. Here the Christian is essentially true to his nature and his creed. He is " on the safe side," and craven timidity in the face of death is considered a necessary consequence of obstinate apostasy.

ALEXANDER VI. (Pope).

Rodrigo Borgia (Pope Alexander VI.) was born in 1431 and died in 1503. To break the power of the Italian princes and appropriate their possessions for the benefit of his own children, he employed the

ordinary weapons of his time—perjury, poison and the dagger. The charges against him include also incest and apostasy. In 1492 he was "elevated" to the papal chair, of which he had already assured himself by flagrant bribery. During his pontificate Savonarola, who had urged his deposition, was burned, and the censorship of books was introduced. According to one account he died by partaking accidentally of poisoned wine, intended for ten cardinals, his guests. Another story relates that he died of fever. But the circumstance that his son, Cæsar, was simultaneously attacked with the like symptoms, and "the aspect of the body, which was hideously disfigured," serve to confirm the suspicion of poison. (Gregorovius, *History of the City of Rome in the Middle Ages*, VII., pp. 516-521).

BONIFACE VIII. (Pope).

Benedetto Gætano was born in 1235, and proclaimed Pope Boniface VIII. in 1294. He consistently used his office to enrich his nephew. Dante (Inferno) calls him the "Prince of the New Pharisees." L. C. Jane says that he aimed "to free the Church from all obligations to the State"; that ultimately he fell a victim to the hostility of a single Roman family, the Colonna; and that "his death in a frenzy of impotent rage and cursing marks the fall of the universal dominion of the Papacy." (*The Interpretation of History*, p. 103). He died in 1303, having for two days refused food, through fear of poison. His last days are described by Gregorovius as "beyond measure terrible." Feelings of fear, suspicion, revenge and loneliness tortured his spirit. It was re-

ported that he shut himself up in his room, " beat his head in frenzy against the wall, and was at last found dead in his bed." (*Rome in the Middle Ages*, V. 595.)

JESUS CHRIST.

EVERY scholar who has critically investigated the Gospel story of the life of Jesus Christ admits now that, whether the narrative contains a nucleus of history or not, a mass of myth has surrounded it. Here, however, we are concerned with the record as it stands written.

It is not improbable that Jesus at first expected that God would intervene on his behalf and that he would be acclaimed as the Messiah. When he saw more and more clearly that a revolt against the Roman power was hopeless he declared that the Kingdom of God is not of this world. At this stage of his mission he prepared for the martyrdom that is so often the lot of the prophet. But till the last act of the drama he was persuaded that he was under God's care, and shortly before the end he announced that his second advent was near at hand.

He spoke " with authority," a claim which no other teacher could make in the same sense, he raised the dead, he was Lord of the Sabbath, and through him alone could man live for ever. Despite all this " authority," at his death, which was the culmination of his mission to save mankind, he " began to be sorrowful and very heavy," prayed that his cup of bitterness " might pass from him," and at the very last exclaimed, " My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?"

Many " liberal " Protestants to-day deny that the strong language used by Jesus about the future life was meant to be taken literally. Let them settle that themselves. What matters is the tragic fact that for more than a thousand years his language convinced Christians that an eternal hell is a real place, and that its penalties are incurred as the result of unbelief. No other " spiritual " authority has done so much to drench the world in blood.

WILLIAM COWPER.

COWPER the poet was born in 1731. His father was the rector of Great Berkhamstead. It was in his thirty-second year that Cowper began to feel " a terrible conviction of sin," and from then until his death in 1800 he had frequent periods of religious melancholia, with occasional moments of exaltation, when " he regarded himself as converted." In one of his more dismal fits of despondency he upbraided himself fiercely for having written *John Gilpin*. Not long before his death, in answer to the inquiry of his doctor as to how he felt, the poet exclaimed, " Feel ! I feel unutterable despair." W. M. Rossetti says : " The end was gloomy : religious despair was busy in tormenting his mind, and dropsy his body." In his poetry Cowper refers more than once to Voltaire, of whom he says :—

> " An Infidel in health, but what when sick ?
> Oh, then a text would touch him to the quick."

The self-tormenting poet's own life and death afford the most appropriate comment on these lines, and on the tragic influence of his theology.

THOMAS CRANMER.

CRANMER was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1532. It is impossible to acquit him of complicity in the burning of Frith and Lambert for denying the doctrine of transubstantiation, and of Friar Forrest for upholding the papal supremacy. Nor did he protest against the burning of two Anabaptists, a man and a woman. He drifted towards Protestantism, but trembled at the near approach of a painful death, renounced the Reformed faith, and signed seven recantations. Nevertheless, face to face with the stake in 1556 he grew braver. Holding in the flames the hand with which he had signed the recantation, he exclaimed, " Ah ! that unworthy right hand !" (*Chambers Encyclopædia,* III., 541). Yet the Roman Catholic writer, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, in his book on Cranmer, makes much of the burning of Frith and Lambert, but has not a word of admiration for the Protestant " martyr."

JOHN VIII. (POPE).

POPE JOHN VIII. was troubled throughout his pontificate (872-882) by the Saracens, whom he was obliged to buy off by a yearly tribute. He tried to unite the Eastern Church with Rome but was defeated by the craft of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who had been excommunicated by Pope Nicholas I. According to the annalist Fulda, John was murdered by members of his own household. Poison was administered to him, but as it worked too slowly his skull was fractured by a blow from a hammer. (Gregorovius, *Rome in the Middle Ages,* III., p. 204).

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

JOHNSON was born in 1709. His whole life was clouded by his fear of death. (Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Hill's edition, ii. 106). Being told of Hume's statement that he " was no more uneasy to think he should *not be* after this life than that he *had not been* before he began to exist " Johnson replied that Hume was either a madman or a liar (iii., 295). He remarked once to Boswell and Mrs. Knowles that death is a terrible thing and that no man can be sure of his salvation. He died in 1784. His doctor, it is true, said that before the end actually came Johnson's fears were calmed and absorbed by his faith and his trust in the merits of Christ; but it is evident from Boswell's account of his last illness that he required a lot of " soothing " and " comforting." He was restless and awkward and terribly concerned about the spiritual condition of nearly every one with whom he came into contact (Boswell's *Life*, Hill, IV., 411-418).

LEO X. (POPE).

GIOVANNI DE' MEDICI became Leo X. in 1513. He was a scholar and liberally supported poets and artists. He excommunicated Luther and conferred on our Henry VIII. the title " Defender of the Faith." He is reported to have exclaimed, *Quantas divitias nobis dedit haec de Christo fabula*! (What a lot of wealth this fable about Christ has brought us!). He certainly delighted in the things of sense, and to his contemporaries appeared one of the most magnificent of Popes. He died in 1521. According to one report he was poisoned; according to another he contracted a loathsome disease, a disease with which every "class,

married or unmarried, clergy or laity," was then said to be infected. (J. W. Draper, *History of the Intellectual Development of Europe*, ii. 232). Gregorovius says: "An incurable malady, exile, imprisonment, enemies, a conspiracy of cardinals, wars, lastly the loss of all his nearest relations and friends darkened the joyous days of the Pope."

MARTIN LUTHER.

LUTHER was born in 1483 and died in 1546. The stories of his last days are interesting as an indication of the spirit of mendacity that inspires Christians in their charges against each other. What standard of veracity will they observe in dealing with the death-bed of a Voltaire? Mgr. Ségur says that Luther "died forlorn of God, blaspheming to the very end." (*Plain Talk about the Protestantism of To-day*, pp. 224-6). Luther's biographer, Hartmann Grisar, the Jesuit, tells a different story altogether. According to him, within twenty years of the Reformer's death a report was in circulation that he committed suicide. "It is barely credible to us to-day what inventions grew up in the sixteenth century, both on the Catholic and the Protestant side, about the deaths of well-known public men who happened to be the object of animosity to one party or the other." (*Luther*, vi., pp. 382-3). This was truly Nemesis triumphant, for Luther himself did much to pave the way for such stories, frequently relating fearsome tales of the deaths of Catholics or unbelievers.

CARDINAL MANNING.

HENRY EDWARD MANNING was born in 1808 and died in 1892. In 1840 he became Archdeacon of Chichester, but eleven years later joined the Church of Rome. In 1875 he was created Cardinal. One of his utterances has become a " familiar quotation " among " No Popery " alarmists : " The will of an imperial race is to be bent, broken, and subdued to the Faith " (quoted in the *Quarterly Review,* Vol. 126, p. 294). For a considerable part of his life—and the same is true of Cardinal Newman—he was almost obsessed by the idea of death and the future life. On September 23, 1888, he wrote in his Diary : " I have but one desire and prayer, that is to make a good end." Dr. R. F. Horton says that as Manning drew near to this " end " he was oppressed with an awful anxiety about the future (*England's Danger,* 1899, p. 139.)

HUGH MILLER.

HUGH MILLER was born in 1802. He was a pious member of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, but throughout his life was interested in science and literature. From his seventeenth to his thirty-fourth year he worked as a stonemason. *The Old Red Sandstone* (1841) and some of his other geological works are not only remarkable from a scientific point of view, but they are written in a clear, attractive style. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century the " conflict between religion and science " meant for most practical purposes the controversy concerning the age of the earth as estimated by the geologists. *The Testimony of the Rocks,* written in 1856, is an attempt

to reconcile Genesis and geology. Miller saw plainly enough that the theologian had often made himself "eminently ridiculous" by not restricting himself to his proper province; but to declare the "introduction to the Scriptures" to be a "picturesque myth" —that was the rejection of the authority of revelation altogether. Under the strain of this and other work his brain gave way and he shot himself on December 23, 1856. The tragedy of the thing is heightened today when the Genesis account of the Creation and the Fall is so completely discredited as the result not only of science but of historical criticism.

GEORGE TYRRELL.

GEORGE TYRRELL was born in Dublin in 1861, and brought up in the Anglican communion. He soon came to the conclusion that in regard to his religious faith it must be "Rome or nothing," and was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1879. In the following year he became a member of the Society of Jesus. It was the question of eternal punishment that "constituted the first chapter in the long history of his rupture with the Society." Finally, the Jesuits suspended him and Pius X. deprived him of the Sacrament on the ground that he was a Modernist. During this period of strain and stress he sometimes yearned to return to the Anglican fold, to the Church of Westcott and Hort. Many of Tyrrell's writings will long retain their interest for the Freethinker. In *Essays on Faith and Immortality* (1914) he criticizes acutely some of the "arguments" for man's survival of death.

The details of Tyrrell's last moments are related in Chapter xxii (written by his niece, Miss M. D. Petre) of the *Autobiography and Life of George Tyrrell* (Vol. II.). In a codicil to his will, dated January 1, 1909, six months before his death, Tyrrell declared that there was no basis for the rumour that he made any sort of "retractation of those Catholic principles" which he had defended against the Vatican decrees. During his last illness he repeated this statement. Official Catholic burial was refused him, but the Abbé Bremond read a funeral address—a service for which the Bishop of Southwark afterwards forbade him to say Mass.

Printed and Published by
THE PIONEER PRESS (G. W. Foote & Co., Ltd.)
61 Farringdon Street. London, E.C.4.

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